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A Third Person.

By B. M. CROKER,

Author of "PROPER PRIDE," "DIANA BARRINGTON," "TWO MASTERS,"
"INTERFERENCE," "A FAMILY LIKENESS," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

QUITE A BRIDAL BOUQUET.

AND how had Captain Hope spent the evening? Not as satisfactorily as he had expected, as may be readily imagined. His cousin Clara was another individual to whom the great ball of the season had proved an unqualified disappointment.

Mrs. Skyler had taken time by the forelock, and had arrayed herself in full evening costume before dinner, believing that by this arrangement, she would ensure a *tête-à-tête* with Roger, whilst her mother and Annie were making their toilettes.

Annie had inspected her sister's premature magnificence, with immensely elevated eyebrows, and had listened to her plausible excuses "that Wickes could not possibly attire three people at the same time, and therefore she had sacrificed her own inclinations and dressed thus early, so as to be out of the way."

For Clara to inconvenience herself to get out of any one's way was an event that had at least the merit of novelty, and Annie appended a mental rider to the effect: "She wants *us* out of the way, that is the real truth," and Annie's surmises were correct.

As Clara sat alone by the drawing-room fire, slowly sipping her coffee, her reflections were not altogether disagreeable, judging by the expression of her eyes—which were intently fixed upon the blazing coals—she was thinking:

"I am looking my very best to-night—no one would take me for more than six-and-twenty. Roger has promised to write to me; he has made no attempt to meet that girl next door. He

has not spoken to her this time—except the day I escorted him in there—he has forgotten her. Just like a man! And he is certainly contemplating matrimony, for I heard him pumping mother about going out to India to be married, and about outfits and housekeeping. Yes, if I play my cards well, good-bye to England, damp and debt! I shall turn over a new leaf and begin a fresh chapter in my life.”

She rose suddenly, put down her cup, threw off her opera mantle, and walked over to a long mirror in which she surveyed herself dispassionately. “Yes, not more than six-and-twenty,” she murmured; “and *Cérise* has surpassed herself this time,” slowly revolving for her own inspection. “She will charge me something frightful, but, after all, a good cut is everything; and perhaps”—with a smile at herself—“it will come in for the *trousseau*.” Undoubtedly, Mrs. Skyler was looking well, and was wearing a superb gown, a yellow brocade, which fitted her admirably; and from the diamonds twinkling in her hair, to her yellow satin shoes, her toilette was perfection.

“What can be keeping him?” she continued impatiently. “Of course he is packing—here he comes at last!” and she had just time to reseat herself as Roger entered.

“Well!” she exclaimed, “you have been putting up your traps, I suppose. I dressed early so as to have you all to myself, even for a little time, this *last* evening. We can have a nice comfortable talk whilst mother is adorning, and Annie, poor dear, is disfiguring herself! *Her* idea of an evening toilette is a high black grenadine, with a velvet rosette in her hair. She always looks her worst in a ball-room,” continued her amiable sister complacently.

“Ah,” said Roger, who was fond of Annie, “we cannot all be handsome, and her attractions are not exactly on the surface.”

“No. She is safe from any perils which beset the fatal gift of beauty,” rejoined Clara with a sneer. “And,” rising and spreading out her hands to the fire, and looking at her cousin with her head over her shoulder, she said, with her most coquettish air, “pray what do you say to my gown, Roger? What do you think of *me*?”

“I’m not much of a judge,” he answered awkwardly; “but you look ripping.”

“See she continued, producing a programme, which she

dangled playfully before him, "see what a pretty thing I have got. I always secure one on the sly; it prevents one being worried by bores. Now, how many shall I put you down for? Shall we say three?" taking her pencil, "two, and five, and eleven?"

"Yes, with pleasure," responded her companion, and never had he uttered a more stupendous falsehood.

"I wonder if those people are really going from next door?" she continued; "the old tiger and his ewe lamb."

"You mean the general and Miss Yaldwin?" said Roger in his most matter-of-fact style.

"Don't be so silly. Of course I do. It's a pity no good Samaritan will rescue that wretched girl, and take her out to dances. But people don't want stupid young women. Most of them have half a dozen of their own, and cannot be bothered."

"No; I suppose not. Who was it that said, there would be plenty of good Samaritans were it not for the two pence and the oil? However, the general is going to escort his granddaughter to this dance himself."

"Yes; I heard something of it from Annie," said Clara indifferently; "and I shall only believe in it when I see it."

"Oh, here are the flowers at last," remarked Roger, as a parlour-maid now entered with a large box; "and just in the nick of time."

"Bouquets! How too sweet of you," cried Clara, clasping her hands affectedly. "I am so fond of a large bouquet. I can walk into a room behind one with any amount of confidence, and besides it is such a capital screen."

Meanwhile her cousin had been busily occupied in unpacking the flowers, and now exhibited three choice bouquets, fresh from a London florist.

"First come first served," he said. "Take your choice, Clara, though I don't think that there is a pin to choose between them."

"Oh, they are positively too tempting," sniffing them in turn. After a long and exhaustive inspection she said: "With a million thanks, I'll have the camellias and violets; but"—starting as if she had seen a snake—"there is still another in the box, Roger. Did you know? They must have sent it by mistake," and, diving her hand for it, she triumphantly produced

number four. "What a dream! All pure white! How too exquisite!" she exclaimed rapturously. Mentally she was saying, "If this is for that girl, it will be worse for her."

"It's all right," rejoined Roger, with tranquil self-possession; "that one is for Miss Yaldwin."

"Miss Yaldwin," repeated Clara, with slow distinct utterance, as if she had never heard the name before; and there was a moment's expressive silence. "Is *this* a new form of attention to the general?" she asked sarcastically, now throwing down her own bouquet, and taking up the other in its place.

"No."

"And," twisting it round and round in her shaking hands, "*quite* bridal, I declare. Do coming events cast their shadows before?" and she looked across the flowers, with an interrogative squint.

"What was the matter with Clara?" her cousin asked himself nervously. She was often a little odd in her manner; to-day she had been specially restless and eccentric, and now there was a hard ring in her voice that made him feel excessively uncomfortable. Oh, for an interruption! Instead of saying, "Night, or Blücher," he inwardly ejaculated, "My aunt, or the fly."

Mrs. Skyler walked to the door with a determined air, opened it, looked out, and then sailed back to the fireplace, and with a wave of the white bouquet, summoned her cousin to approach. "You have a liking—a *sneaking* liking—for Rose Yaldwin," she began abruptly. "You think she is a cross between a martyr and an angel. Dear me, how she has thrown dust in your eyes, and made an utter fool of you. She is an odious creature. I could tell you pretty stories about her if I liked, but I won't!" she concluded, in a fierce concentrated voice.

"Thank you," replied Roger, stiffly; "I will take the will for the deed."

"Oh, Roger!" she burst out, "how can you look at me so—so unkindly—and speak to me in such a tone when this may be the last time we may ever meet—yes, the very last time?" And Mrs. Skyler sank into a chair in a becoming attitude, covered her face with her hands, and allowed the delicate white bouquet to tumble into the fender.

Roger picked it up carefully, and said, "I have no wish to quarrel with you, Clara. You may be sure, that I have no desire

to carry away from here, where I have spent such happy days, anything but pleasant memories—pleasant memories of every one—and here comes my aunt."

As Mrs. Baggot rustled slowly into the room with an air of conscious self-approval, she was followed by Annie in a smart low gown, with her hair dressed in the newest fashion, and who, at the first glance, had struck Roger as a somewhat ill-favoured stranger. Mrs. Skyler recovered her self-possession in a surprising manner, and at once fell into raptures over her mother's appearance. The bouquets were duly admired and appropriated, and Roger's thoughtfulness in including Rose in his floral offerings, was warmly commended, especially by Mrs. Baggot.

"Don't send it in next door, Roger," was her advice; "it would shock Leach! He would think it might be followed up by a train of bridesmaids, or take it down to the kitchen to talk it over with the cook, and ask if it was to be delivered or given to the greengrocer? I'll put it in a basket, and we will carry it to the ball, and keep it for Rose in the ladies' room, and give it to her when she arrives. I hear their cab driving off now."

This was perfectly true, but the good lady little suspected, that the cab was empty.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SHE COMETH NOT, HE SAID."

HAVING carefully packed his relations, with their three bouquets, into the fly, and ascended the box himself, Roger drove off to this much anticipated ball.

"Were they late?" he wondered anxiously, as they at last drew up in their turn under the great new porch of the Town Hall.

The band was playing briskly, and through an opening he caught glimpses of gyrating figures.

"Oh, it's all right," said Clara reassuringly; "it's only an extra just to try the floor, it's not on the programme, so you may have it. I shall not be a second taking off my cloak; wait outside the door of the ladies' room and I will join you."

There was no getting out of this arrangement, and Roger accepted his fate with an air of calm resignation.

After the extra he walked about with his cousin on his arm, in order, as she said, to look at the decorations and the people; but Roger's attention was entirely devoted to the latter. He was eagerly scrutinizing every group in hopes of catching sight of the general's hooked nose and military figure, not to speak of the general's fair companion; but, alas! his quick soldier eye roved over the crowd of well-dressed men and women—young and old, handsome and ugly, for the pair he sought, in vain.

Meanwhile Clara remained steadfastly beside him, nodding and smiling to acquaintances, and keeping her hand on his coat sleeve with an air of gracious appropriation; the first dance struck up, he edged nearer and nearer to the entrance.

"You are waiting for the general, I can see," said Mrs. Skyler; "I wonder you don't go and stand at the door and receive Miss Yaldwin bouquet in hand. By the way, what have you done with it?"

"I have left it in a safe place," he replied rather shortly. He wished he had been able to do the same with his companion.

"Well, the dance is half over, and you *see* she has not come. It's a sin to waste it, so do take half a turn with me."

This half-turn comprised the remainder of the waltz, and as Mrs. Skyler was a first-rate partner, a celebrated waltzer, in one respect no doubt Roger gained, as Rose Yaldwin was quite an inexperienced performer. Precisely as Rose watched the clock, so did Captain Hope keep his eyes continually fixed on the door. He watched every cab that drove up disgorge its freight, but there was no sign of General Yaldwin and his granddaughter, and he was now a prey to all the feverish miseries of suspense.

Clara kept him in close attendance, and bantered him spitefully on his anxiety and absent-mindedness. He had danced three dances with his cousin and taken her in to refreshments, and yet "She cometh not, he said" might have been the burden of his song, had he been disposed to sing—which was far from being the case. He found it impossible to shake off Clara, who was not in unreasonable demand, and who, nevertheless, was in the highest spirits. "What *luck*," she kept mentally ejaculating; 'what a splendid and unexpected piece of luck! The old tiger has turned crusty—bless him!'

Watchful dowagers and partnerless girls, with ample leisure, noticed how constantly Captain Hope danced with his cousin,

Mrs. Skyler, and wondered if there was anything in it. Five dances out of ten was a liberal allowance for the widow to bestow on her cousin. There was no one to tell these observing beholders, that Clara had asked for every one of them herself, and, a short time afterwards, when he had detached himself, she sought him out and whispered eagerly:

"Oh, Roger, my next partner is *such* a horror! do rescue me; I'll throw him over and dance with you instead."

"The old man of the sea was not in it with Clara," he mentally remarked. "But he was engaged," he pleaded; "and horror or no horror, never threw over his partners: that was a woman's privilege," and Clara withdrew with ill-concealed disgust.

By half-past twelve, Roger was in the lowest possible spirits, for he had given up all hope of seeing Rose Yaldwin again. He looked as grave as a judge, his aunt remarked, when he took her into supper. For her part, she was in buoyant spirits, brilliantly dressed in black and gold, with diamonds glittering in her hair and in her ears, and was enjoying herself extremely. She had met some old Indian friends: she had just been told a most amusing story, and she was hungry. It did not need a shrewd woman like her to be told the reason of her nephew's gloomy expression.

"Where was the general to-night, I wonder?" she asked; "I am surprised he is not here—he is always a man of his word, and punctual to a minute."

"And I conclude to-night is the exception that proves the rule," filling his aunt's glass.

"I imagine the old lady is ill—something of that kind. She won't live long, I'm afraid. Well, Roger, I need not tell you that I am very sorry you are leaving us, and I think you are a little sorry too."

"I never was so sorry for anything in my life," was the surprisingly complimentary reply.

"However, you will be back among us again before very long; your regiment has only another year or so in India. Perhaps by next Christmas we shall see you again." Raising her glass she looked at him and said "Your very good health," and there was a meaning glance in her eye, as she added, "Roger, I wish you—*success*."

"Thank you, Aunt Polly; I've had rather a run of bad luck lately—and to-night the worst of all."

"Have you? I'm sure I never would have guessed it! You've been dancing away, too, the whole evening; but perhaps your idea is:

'Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime,
Il faut aimer ce qu'on a.'

Eh, Roger?"

"No; that's not my style," he protested. "By the way," suddenly jumping up, "this is Annie's dance."

"Very well; never mind me, my dear. Old General Pomeroy will take care of me; and poor dear Annie does not have too many partners. We will go home as soon as it is over."

Annie was in her usual post, sitting among the wallflowers, when her cousin came up and claimed her.

After a few turns he said, "Shall we get away from the crowd and go and sit out a bit?"

Annie would have preferred to finish the dance, being quite fresh and unfatigued, and fond of waltzing, but of course she acceded, and arm-in-arm they sought a retired and dimly-lit little ante-room, which proved to be quite empty, and there seated themselves on a luxurious sort of divan.

"I wonder why the general did not turn up to-night, and, Miss Yaldwin," began Roger at once.

"I cannot imagine. It will be an awful disappointment to poor Rose, she was so eager about coming. I saw her dress this afternoon—it was lovely—and everything laid out ready, even to her hairpins."

"I am awfully disappointed, too; ten times more than she can be. I am sure you have guessed how it is with me, Annie; and I can speak to you somehow, when I could not speak to Clara."

"No; I don't fancy you would get much sympathy from Clara," said Annie, with a short laugh. "I know you like Rose."

"Like!" he echoed impatiently; "I was going to ask her to be my wife to-night."

"Really, Roger!" exclaimed Annie, now sitting bolt upright and gazing at him with a startled expression.

"Yes; I was certain I would see her, and I'm off now in two hours for India, and goodness knows when I shall come back."

"You can write," suggested the ever practical lady.

"Yes; but I would fifty times rather speak," he said, suddenly standing up. "Writing is so unsatisfactory. You will have to help me, Annie—*will* you?" he urged.

Annie rose to her feet also and stood face to face with her companion, who was quite a different person, to her cousin Roger of every day.

"I never have had any fair play, as you know yourself," he continued; "something has set the general against me. It's been awfully hard lines, but you can't force yourself into a man's house. Will you go in and see her to-morrow, Annie, like a good girl, and give her the bouquet with your very *own* hands, and a message from *me*?"

Annie hesitated.

"Do, dear, dear Annie," he pleaded. "You know what bad luck it has been—how I've never had a single chance of speaking to her—and here I am going to India without an opportunity of saying one word."

It was extremely pleasant to plain, middle-aged Miss Baggot to find herself acting as a sort of proxy for a pretty girl, to have her handsome cousin Roger looking straight into her eyes, with impassioned glances, and holding her hand tightly in his, whilst he pleaded with her eagerly in a broken and agitated voice. Yes, it was the nearest approach to a love scene in which she had ever taken a part. The sensation was by no means displeasing!

As to passers-by who gazed into the room, the dance being over, any one of them was ready to swear that it was *not* to Mrs. Skyler, but his cousin Annie, that Captain Hope was devoted; they were undoubtedly engaged—yes, he had proposed for her that evening. As for his being in love with Rose Yaldwin, or ever having given her a thought, it was all the most absurd nonsense.

"You will take her a message from me, and a note?"

"I don't know about the note," said Annie doubtfully; "you had better send it by post."

"At any rate you will tell her, that I was bitterly disappointed; that, as far as I was concerned, it was the most wretched evening I ever spent. Tell her that I shall be home before long. I'll exchange, and, Annie," catching her by her skinny arm, "ask her—you can put it in better words than I can—not to forget me quite. Tell her——"

"The fly is waiting," said a well-known treble. "Roger and Annie," continued Mrs. Skyler, sweeping in through the door, and speaking in a somewhat tart voice, "mother and I have been hunting for you everywhere. What *have* you been doing with yourselves?"

"We have been dancing," said Roger mendaciously. "But I see it is later than I thought, and time for me to be on the move."

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When Rose removed her finery, it was nearly two o'clock, so she would not go to bed. Had she not had, as the general remarked, her first sleep! She dressed herself in her morning gown, and, turning out the gas, opened the shutters and a little bit of the window, and then, with a shawl wrapped round her, took up her post that bitter winter morning.

"At any rate," she said to herself, "she would have the poor satisfaction of seeing the very last of him." Collins, the ever punctual, drove up about half-past two. He rang next door, and then Rose heard steps and voices—his voice—and by the flash of a lantern, saw Captain Hope, encased in a long ulster coat—saw him for the second—he turned and waved his hand to some one at No. 15. Then the gate clanged, the fly door banged, and he was rolled away into the darkness. Rose sat meditating until the dawn began to break; after this, she threw herself on her bed and slept. When she awoke the room was bright with daylight, and Carter was standing beside her with a sympathetic simper on her face, tendering her a bouquet of the most lovely white flowers, tied with long white satin streamers.

"Miss Baggot sent it, ma'am," she explained, "with this note."

Rose at first imagined that she was still dreaming, then she sprang up, rubbed her eyes, and tore the note open. It said:

"DEAR ROSE,

"What became of you last night? We were *all* so disappointed not to see you at the ball, especially Roger. He had provided bouquets for each of us, and I send in yours, by his desire. He started at half-past two o'clock. I have neuralgia in my face, or I would have taken your flowers in myself. Perhaps you can come in and see *me*.—Yours,

A. B."

The bouquet was exquisite, and according to Carter's estimate must have cost pounds—it was like a bridal one!

"It was very kind of Miss Baggot. She must have got it to go with your dress, and paid a heap of money for it."

Rose made no reply as she turned it carefully over and examined the white orchids, tulips, hyacinths, and eucharis lilies. It afforded her some small consolation. She removed the lace and satin streamers, put them away among her few treasures, and placed the bouquet itself in a huge jar of water. When she went downstairs she discovered that her grandmother was ill, and that the family doctor had been summoned. She was kept in close attendance in the sick room all day, and there was no going in to No. 15. Once or twice she managed to fly upstairs just to look at her bouquet—all that was left of a delightful dream, of shattered hopes, was a bunch of dying white flowers.

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Towards evening Mrs. Skyler, who had only recently risen, came in ostensibly to inquire for Mrs. Yaldwin, but in reality to cross-examine Rose, and give her a *coup de griffe*.

"So your grandfather went to sleep," she said in her pleasantest manner; "and I hear you could not wake him. Poor dear, I *am* so sorry for you, though probably after all you did not miss much."

"No. Did I not?" with ill-assumed nonchalance.

"You see"—now removing her boa, and taking a comfortable chair before the fire and placing her feet on the fender stool—"girls who know *no* one get no partners. If you went out regularly it would be quite another affair, and if men knew that you danced well. As it is, they have their own set of friends, and an outside girl is generally left sitting in a corner all night. It's a miserable experience, I am *told*, though, thank goodness, I know nothing of it myself."

"No; I suppose not," rejoined Rose dreamily. What matter how Mrs. Skyler patronized her now?

"It was a splendid ball. Roger said he did not know when he had enjoyed himself so much. He danced seven or eight times with me. He is a dreadful flirt, is he not?"

"I am sure I don't know," returned Rose gravely.

"Now, my dear little girl," continued Mrs. Skyler, looking at

her companion with her head rather on one side, "you know he flirted with you to a most absurd extent, and I must say that I think it was a *great* shame. It is all very well, to make love to the Strattons and Gascoignes, hardened garrison hacks, but to make a fool of an unsophisticated child like you was really too bad. Roger is a faithless wretch, and his love affairs are legion ; but I am really very angry with him on *your* account."

Something seemed to clutch Rose by the throat, and for several seconds she could not articulate. Her face was burning, her hands were trembling, and her heart was beating very fast. To have the sympathy and pity of Mrs. Skyler was unbearable. No, she would not endure it. Why should this odious, scheming woman, this hypocrite, trample on her? At last she found her voice—a voice that vibrated with passion as she said :

"Captain Hope never flirted with me, or made a fool of me, as you so delicately express it. Be as angry as you please with him on your own account, but please leave me and my affairs alone."

"Rose Yaldwin, do you mean to be impertinent?" broke out Mrs. Skyler, and then she paused, for the general had just entered the room ; therefore, for the present, hostilities were bound to be postponed. As General Yaldwin accosted the little widow, he mentally remarked : "By Jove, this cast in her eye is getting worse. It is a downright *squint* to-day."

(*To be continued.*)

A Week in Worcestershire.

By J. ERROL.

AS we approached Great Malvern, we looked out of the carriage windows and saw the tall green Beacon Hill with its zigzag winding paths, leading by gentle and gradual slopes to the summit, and we were immediately seized with a strong desire to climb its fern and bracken-covered sides, and standing on its breezy crest study the sublime view. But alas! there was first the obvious necessity of looking for a place wherein to lay our heads, so we turned away from the alluring prospect of a scramble up the Worcestershire Beacon, and proceeded to leave the station, making our way up the gently rising streets to the centre of the town, being struck and charmed as we went by the absence of stiff parallelogramism and the picturesqueness of the villas embowered in luxuriant foliage, and brightened by a variety of lovely flowers, with always a background of the grand hills, standing out cameo-fashion, sharply defined against the clear blue of the sky, with here and there a solitary fir, pine, or oak throwing its delicate tracery against the azure canopy.

We settled down in a charming little white cottage with a flower-wreathed porch, and Gothic gables and quaint twisted chimney-stacks, and a garden that was a veritable rose-bower, so thickly and luxuriantly did the queen of flowers flourish there. The air was heavy with their perfume, and the lesser sweets of clove pinks, mignonette, cherry pie and sweet pea, and we fain would have lingered within its fair and shady precincts, only there was much to be seen, and we had come to Worcestershire sternly resolved to see all we could in seven days, and had no time to waste in idle loitering, however pleasant. So we put on india-rubber shoes, seized our long, steel-pointed sticks, and set out to climb the Worcestershire Beacon.

We had not gone far when we encountered a curious old female, with an antediluvian bonnet adorned with a huge blue "Ugly," that reminded one forcibly of the crinolines of bygone days, who

besought us in moving terms "to take a donkey," an honour which we declined, preferring to trust to our own feet rather than those of her animals, some of them being but sorry brutes. She, however, was not easily daunted, and followed us for some way until we came to another donkey-stand, where a still more extraordinary old creature, with a cotton sun-bonnet, and a particularly shrewish aspect, was occupied in skirmishing with a tribe of small boys, grandsons or great-grandsons we imagined, whose duty it was to drive the donkeys up the hill, but who did everything that they ought not to do according to the old dame, whose attention was arrested, happily for them and for us, by the first donkey-lady, and during the lively encounter that ensued we made our escape, and toiled on to St. Ann's Well, which is about a third of the distance to the top of the Beacon Hill. Here we stopped, and entering the pretty Swiss house refreshed ourselves with a glass of the crystal-clear water, which has a mean temperature of forty-eight degrees, and is pleasant to the taste, though it contains carbonate of lime, magnesia, iron, and soda, sulphate of lime and soda, chloride of sodium and magnesium, oxide of potassium and silicic acid, and has wonderful remedial powers on cases of acidity and dyspepsia.

From this well a path, wide enough to admit of mule-carriages and bath chairs, leads to the summit in a zigzag fashion, revealing fine views at every turn, till the crest is reached, when a truly magnificent view met our eyes. Immediately below lay Malvern, with its capricious and varied yet picturesque houses, Gothic, Corinthian, Swiss, Italian, Elizabethan, Jacobean, Georgian, Oriental, with the cathedral towers of Worcester plainly visible. On the north-east was a hazy line that we knew were the Salopian hills. On the south-east the Cotswold, and the "Queenly Severn" flowing like a stream of flashing silver through valley and greenwood. On the west our eyes ranged the tree-crowned knolls of Herefordshire, the green fertile valleys of Worcester, bounded by the giant mountains of Monmouth and Wales, and on the south we saw the hills of Somersetshire, "The Quantock high lands, and Mendip's sunless caves," and the Herefordshire Beacon rearing its lofty crest heavenwards.

It lay like a map below us, many of the fair verdant counties of England diversified by lakes, thickly-leaved trees, emerald meadows, golden cornfields, dark outlying hedges, tawny hay-

stacks, red-roofed cottages, grey churches with sharp-pointed tapering spires or minarets, palatial mansions that gleamed whitely from amid the embowering foliage, dense and thick as though summer was still in the flush of her meridian, with a background away in the far distance of the English hills and Welsh mountains, on whose tall crests the clouds threw fantastic shadows, and the sun golden and mellow lights. After feasting our eyes for a while we turned and walked along the ridge to the North Hill, getting a fine view of West Malvern as we went, and the rich woods, beautiful undulating hills, and purple-hued apple trees of Herefordshire, and a glimpse of the Wrekin in Shropshire; then we descended by the way of the Ivy Scar Rock, so called from the ivy that clusters round it, and walking by the Priory church visited Swan Pool, a charming shady piece of water, the abiding place of numerous snowy-plumaged swans, and tiny, fluffy, grey cygnets. Then we came back through a monastic-looking mediæval gateway, beautifully decorated with rich carving, and were amused to see, when we passed under it, on the interior wall, a brass plate, which set forth that a lawyer had his office there. Being so near the priory, of course we went in. This abbey church is a venerable pile of cruciform structure, somewhat resembling Gloucester cathedral, and possesses a veritable Norman minster. Some of the stained glass windows are magnificent, and are considered about the best specimens in England of fifteenth-century glass; they were given to the abbey by Henry VII., who was very much attached to Malvern, and often sought refuge from the troublous affairs of State in its leafy glades, accompanied by his queen, Elizabeth of York, and Princes Arthur and Henry. The latter was the prince who afterwards as Henry VIII. laid waste Malvern Priory in part, and utterly ruined other Roman Catholic places of worship, undoing his father's work, in his mad hatred of those who refused to free him from his unhappy Catholic bride, Catherine of Aragon. The tiles in the church are remarkable from the fact of their having been made under the superintendence of the holy fathers at a kiln on the priory farm, and there are few churches in England that possess such a quantity of encaustic tiles; many of them date from 1450, and some of them bear the armorial bearings of the patrons of the building, viz.: Edward the Confessor; Bohun, Earl of Hereford; Gilbert Clare, Earl of Gloucester; Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and many

others. The monks' stalls are very old, and are worthy of attention, and the sub-sella, or under seats, are carved grotesquely, and depict secular subjects as well as sacred.

The next morning we got up early, and hiring a carriage drove off to see "ye faithfull citie" of Worcester. It was a drive of eight miles in length and took us through some very pretty rural English scenery. Hop-fields full of the clinging vines, orchards where the trees were heavy with the ripening apples and pears, green, lush-looking meadows where the cattle stood knee-deep in the flowery grasses, past queer white-washed heavily-beamed cottages and spacious mansions, through the little old-world village of Powick, once the seat of John Beauchamp, promoted to the dignity of baron by Henry VII., and celebrated as the scene of an encounter between the Royalists and Parliamentary forces in 1642, and the battle of Powick Bridge in 1651; and two miles further on was Worcester, on the eastern bank of the Severn, and nearly in the middle of the county, which takes its name from it. The cathedral is of red sandstone, in form double cross and of Gothic architecture. Its tower is 200 feet high. The reredos is of alabaster, malachite, gold and lapis lazuli, and near it is the gilt effigy of King John. In the cloisters are curious stone troughs, which were water troughs for the monks' refectory. After leaving the cathedral we went to the ancient gateway known as King Edgar's Tower, and descending the steps on the right invaded the registrar's domains, who most kindly showed us the marriage contract of one "William *Shagspere* with one Anne Hathway, 25th of Elizabeth, 1582." This was a curious old parchment document, carefully framed and glazed and quite undecipherable to ordinary eyes, though the gentleman who showed it to us managed to make out the greater part of it.

Of course we visited the Porcelain Works, and saw the stone, flint, china clay, felspar and calcined bones, that are used in the manufacture of the beautiful Worcester china. The process was most interesting from beginning to end. The mills, with huge pans, where they grind the stone, the slip house, the thrower, who works the potter's wheel, receiving from his assistant a lump of clay which he throws on the head of the wheel, pressing it with both hands, the rotary movement causing it to rise in a cone, which he depresses, and then allows to rise again, inserting his thumb into the mass, fashioning the outside with his right hand.

This is the way in which bowls and cups are made. After being pressed in a mould to remove some of the moisture, the handles are fixed on with a little liquid clay, called slip, and the cups are then placed in oval seggars, ranged on china rings to keep them straight, on a bed of finely-ground flint. The seggars, when full, are piled one over the other most carefully in the oven, and the oven is heated to a white heat, which takes about forty hours, and is left for a further forty-eight hours until it is cool. In the dipping-room are huge tubs of glaze, made from glass chemically prepared from borax, flint, lead, &c., ground very fine, until it assumes the consistency of cream. From the dipping-room the ware is taken to the drying stove, where the glaze is dried on the ware; after that it goes to the glost oven, and is fired for sixteen hours; when cool, some thirty-six hours later, it is removed and sent to be decorated by the painters and gilders, and it is very interesting to watch the artists engaged in drawing birds, flowers, or landscapes, as some of the older men work without anything to copy from, and design as they go along. In the museum attached to the works are beautiful specimens of porcelain, dating from 1751, and some of the celebrated "Flight and Barr" china.

From the porcelain works we went to the Guildhall to see the portrait of George III., who honoured the Corporation with his presence on August 8th, 1788. In one of the lower rooms of this fine Queen Anne building are some perfect specimens of Cromwellian armour: backs, breasts, morions, pikes, said to have been found on the field of battle in 1651, when Charles I. was defeated on the heights above the city; and when his troops gave way, and he saw defeat was inevitable, he passed through Sodbury Gate, while his devoted cavaliers upset a hay wagon at the gateway, which was very narrow, blocking the way and thus enabling him to escape his enemies. Bignal, a Royalist, brought a horse ready saddled for the king, and he hurried to his quarters in the Corn Market, and when Colonel Cobbet found that he was there, King Charles, in a disguise, went out at the back, as Cromwell's colonel drew rein at the front, and, remounting Bignal's horse, rode away with Lord Wilmot, escaping his foes for a while.

The Guildhall is further embellished on the outside by life-size statues of Charles I. and Charles II. The latter is remarkably like the waxen effigy of the "Merrie Monarch" that glowers in

a glass case in the room above Canon Islip's chapel in Westminster Abbey. There are some remarkable timber houses in Friar Street, with peaked gables and overhanging upper stories, and quarried windows that look as if they had been built when Good Queen Bess reigned over England. In Sidbury Street is the old Commandry, a college for the adult blind, after visiting which, we hurried to the station and took the train on to Evesham, a drowsy little town, lying between Bredon Hill and Edge Hill, on a peninsula formed by the river Avon, and possessing a venerable and hoary abbey, of which only the tower remains, founded by Egwin, third Bishop of Worcester, who became first abbot of the monastery attached to it.

The battle between Simon Montfort, Earl of Leicester, and Prince Edward, afterwards King Edward I., was fought near Evesham on 4th August, 1263, and the former was killed, with almost all the barons who had taken up arms against the weak Henry III. We were very tired when we got back to our rose-embowered cottage, and quite ready for "the cup that cheers." Nevertheless, the next morning we started early in a *char-à-banc* for the Wych Pass, a deep artificial cutting made through the solid rock of the hill, and now forming part of the road to Ledbury. Every curve and turn of this road, which is 900 feet above the level of the sea, unfolds a scene of rare and romantic beauty. On one side it is rugged and mountainous, on the other, level and highly cultivated. On the east we commanded views of Worcestershire, and on driving through the pass we emerged on the Herefordshire side of the Malvern Hills, and all the way up to the Herefordshire Beacon we enjoyed a series of most lovely views.

When arrived there we alighted, and climbed the hill to see the British camp on its summit, which is most interesting. Within its ramparts and ditches our Celtic forefather, Caractacus, and his brave Silures, defied imperial Rome's victorious legions. It was the place of divine oracles, a temple wherein was practised the terrible Druidical mysteries, and the seat of council and judgment, as well as a fortified stronghold. It covers an area of about 43 acres, is 1,100 yards long, and 2,970 yards in circumference, and anciently commanded the only pass through the Malvern hills. After scrambling down a somewhat steep path, we walked to Colwall to see Burstner's Cross, so called from the

preaching-cross set up by Walm and Moorall, the first Silurian missionaries. Here in the midst of the heathenish and cruel Druidical worship, they preached glad tidings of Christianity to their Celtic countrymen, and here to lend support to them came Bran, the venerable father of Caractacus. In this spot, in 1650, a peasant digging in his garden found a richly-jewelled coronet, supposed to have been dropped in battle or flight by an early British chieftain. A little beyond we saw the early home of the poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Hope End, an eastern type of mansion with minarets, and farther on we came to Bosbury, a quaint, old-world village, with grand timber houses, and ornamental barge-boards, and a church with a detached tower of three stages, some eighty feet to the south of the chancel. Once this place was the seat of the Knights Hospitallers. That afternoon we indulged in a drive right round the hills, for which we paid the large sum of one shilling each.

The next day we set off by train for Ledbury, which, though *not* in Worcestershire, we had a great desire to see. We found it a very dull town, prettily situated on the river Ledden, and containing some quaint timber houses, and many red ones of Queen Anne's time; and some evidently of the Georgian period, flat square, bald-looking buildings, hideously ugly. The most interesting thing we thought in Ledbury was the queer old timber-framed market-house, built of timber and lath, the latter white-washed, the former blackened, raised on sixteen sturdy oak pillars. As we had never seen anything like it in all our wanderings, we examined it attentively, and speculated as to why it should have been perched up aloft on the oaken pillars in such a curious fashion. It was evidently very, very old, perhaps as old as the hospital of St. Katherine near it, which was founded in 1232 by Bishop Hugh Folliatt for "six single men, two widows, and two men and their wives." The poor women come off second best by this arrangement, unless the men had a plurality of "wives." The church has a detached tower like so many in Italy, and exhibits a transition from Romanesque to Perpendicular style. The wooden gates are shown with bullet-holes in them; they were damaged at the time of the Parliamentary wars, we supposed. From the church we proceeded to the Feathers Hotel, refreshed the inner man, and hiring a four-wheeled dog-cart drove over to Eastnor Castle, Lady Henry Somerset's residence. This place, rebuilt by

her father Earl Somers, from designs by Smirke, in the style of Edward I.'s reign, combines the appearance of a feudal castle, with all the comforts inside of a modern house, and contains some lovely tapestry and fine pictures and armour. The grounds are charming, and the myriads of white doves that have their abode at the massive gateway add greatly to the picturesque effect. With the exception of the tower, the church was rebuilt in 1852, and contains many beautiful monuments to the Cocks family. On our fifth day we walked along the Kone, a fine stretch of level grass, where equestrians can enjoy a good gallop, through Malvern Wells, up the steep road that leads to Wind's Point, the pretty pointed gabled house, with shady, green verandahs, where Jenny Lind (Madame Otto Goldschmidt) passed the last four years of her life.

Amid the Norwegian-like scenery, on the summit of the Wind-blown hill, where the breezes swirl and riot, some thousand feet above the sea level, and the last rays of the setting sun linger lovingly long after the valleys and vales below are steeped in shade. And what an incomparable view greeted her eyes every day, Tewkesbury, Gloucester, Cheltenham, the far-off Salopian hills, the Black mountains, the forest of Dean, and all the fair orchard land that lies between. The house was built by a Captain Johnson, who blasted the rock away, and built it in the sort of rocky quarry he thus made, spending a large sum of money on the operation, and at one time it was known by the significant title of "Johnson's Folly." Jenny Lind bought it in 1883, and died there on the 2nd of November, 1887. A handsome red granite cross marks her grave in the pretty, peaceful cemetery that lies to the east of Great Malvern, and on it is a medallion of white marble, on which is carved a harp and the one word "Excelsior."

The following morning we went down to the station, and were conveyed by a Midland train in about thirty minutes to Tewkesbury, of ancient fame, which, like a *passée* belle, exists upon her historical reputation, and a gigantic flour mill. Tewkesbury is partly in Worcestershire and partly in Gloucestershire. We wandered through a long street till we arrived at the abbey, the foundation of which dates from 715, when Oddo and Doddo, Dukes of Mercia, founded a monastery for monks of the Benedictine Order, and built an Anglo-Saxon church here, in the

reigns of Ethelred and Ethelbald. Tradition says that Eadburgha, daughter of "Offa the Terrible," King of Mercia, murdered her husband Beortric, King of the West Saxons, in the year 800, and that his body was buried by Hugo, a Mercian earl, in his priory of Tewkesbury. This earl's tomb was seen on the north side of the nave of the abbey by Leland, in Henry VIII.'s reign.

The greater part of the present building is Norman, and was erected by Robert Fitz-Hamon, nephew-in-law of William the Conqueror, though there are still some remains of the Early Saxon style to be seen here and there. It is built in the form of a cross, and a tower supported by four arches stands upon the intersection. The pillars are cylindrical and massive, and form an arcade of noble columns. But the effect is a little spoiled by the groined and handsomely-decorated roof, which was added in the fourteenth century, being too low for the size of the pillars. The aisles were also rebuilt and a group of chapels projecting from them like a French *chevet*. The three Norman apsidals of the old plan are still distinctly visible. Under the tower lies Prince Edward, the unfortunate son of Henry VI. and Margaret of Anjou; a brass tablet marks the spot, on which is the following inscription: "Here lies Edward, Prince of Wales, cruelly slain whilst a youth, Anno Domini 1471, on 4th May. Alas! for the savagery of men. Thou wert the sole light of thy mother and the last hope of thy race." Two daggers are on the plate, those of Gloucester and Clarence, by whom he is said to have been murdered. Curiously enough the Duke of Clarence's tomb is at the back of the altar. He lies alongside his wife, Isabella, daughter of Richard Neville, the king-maker, sister of Anne, who was first the wife of the unfortunate Prince Edward, and next espoused Richard, Duke of Gloucester, afterwards Richard III. These ladies were grand-daughters of Isabella Despencer, Countess of Warwick.

The Despencer monument, north of the altar steps, was erected to the memory of Hugh, and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury. This lady, on her first husband's death in 1348, married Guy de Brien, Lord of Welwyn, who was standard-bearer to the English king at the famous battle of Crecy (A.D. 1346), and was knighted on the field for his bravery. It would seem, however, that the first was the favourite, for by her special desire she was buried by Despencer. Poor Sir Guy lies all alone, in the cold, on the opposite side of the ambu-

latory, his monument forming the screen of St. Margaret's Chapel. There are full-length alabaster figures of all three, rather flat as to nose, otherwise in a good state of preservation. A nephew of the last named, one Edward Despencer, fought with the Black Prince at Poitiers in 1356, and the chapel on the south side was erected by his widow, Elizabeth de Burghersh. His effigy, in armour, kneeling, is on the top, facing the altar, and is considered a great curiosity, as there is not another one like it in England. Near the vestry door, in the southern wall, is the tomb of Alan, one of the abbots of the monastery, sometime prior of Canterbury, friend and biographer of Thomas à Becket, who died in 1202. The coffin is of Purbeck marble, and lies under a plain semi-quatrefoil arch. It was opened in 1765, and when the lid was taken off the body was in a surprisingly perfect condition, considering that it had been there upwards of five hundred years. Even the folds of the drapery were distinct. The old door of the sacristy is very curious; it is plated and banded with iron, fastened by huge nails, and looks as though it could even now resist the onslaught of furious soldiery. By the altar, high up against the wall, is an oaken turreted sort of miniature castle for the sacring bell, and in the chancel is a stone figure with curious banded mail armour, said to be Lord Wenlock, who was killed at the battle of Tewkesbury by the Duke of Somerset, who, in a mad fit of rage, clove his skull in two, though they were both fighting for the Lancastrians. Wiseacres, however, say that this armour is of much earlier date than the battle of Tewkesbury. Quite a hundred years earlier. There is one peculiarity about this figure, there are only socks on the feet; generally they are represented covered with mail like the rest of the body. The why and wherefore of this peculiarity I could not discover. The stained glass in some of the windows, date 1330, is peculiarly rich and beautiful in colour, and depicts secular figures, the de Clares and Despenchers. There were many, many more things of interest to be seen in this splendid abbey, but we could not linger longer. We were dying to see the "Bloody Meadow," where the unfortunate flying Lancastrians were slaughtered, and the battlefield where the actual struggle took place. We inquired our way, and found the latter at last, and I must own that it looked very like any other green and luxuriant field. After gazing at it and trying to picture the terrible strife

that took place there on 4th May, 1471, we got back to the road, and made our way to the Union, turning from there down Windmill Hill Lane; at the bottom of this lane to the right was a long, narrow field and a long, broad one, and as we were quite at a loss to know which was *the Bloody Meadow*, we tapped at the door of a little lodge, and asked a grey-haired and venerable old man, who answered our summons if he would kindly point us out the right spot. He came at once, though he was terribly afflicted, and bent almost to the ground as he walked, shaking all the time. We asked him what was the matter with him, and he replied gravely, "At first I thought it was viper's dance, onny the dooctor 'ee tells me it's my spinal coord." Later on during a chat he gave us the astounding piece of information that his son was "in sarvice and now druvs a prawn, and 'is liver is green!" At first we thought it was some dreadful disease the gentleman who drove a "prawn" suffered from, but finally we came to the conclusion that it was his coat that was green, and not that useful organ, the liver. But this is digression. To return to our subject, the meadow was narrow, with sloping sides, and in the middle was an old withy-bordered watercourse.

Tradition has it that a large number of Lancastrian soldiers who were flying in hot haste from the Gaston's battlefield before the victorious Yorkists, were overtaken here, and slain in such numbers that the low-lying parts of the meadow were "knee-deep in gore." Probably the story has grown in process of being handed down from generation to generation; still the position and appearance of the field suggests that there was some cause for the not very pleasant appellation it has received. After studying the scene of that desperate fray where Margaret of Anjou met the crushing and overwhelming sorrow of her life, we walked across the meadow, climbed a couple of stiles, and came to the Severn, where Margaret passed the ford at Lower Lode, when she escaped from her relentless enemies. She had committed herself to the care of two poor monks belonging to a small religious house in the neighbourhood, who knew well where the ford existed, and who led their royal mistress's horse to the other side, where she found refuge in the house of one Master Thomas Payne, who, with his wife Ursula, met the poor fugitive queen with reverence and respect, and entreated her to rest in their house, which she did for one night, going on next day to seek

some surer place of refuge. They still show, at Payne's Place, a pretty room in the eastern wing of the house, called "the Queen's Room," where Queen Margaret slept after the disastrous day at Tewkesbury.

After three days of hiding, the queen was captured and held as a prisoner of state until her father paid the sum of fifty thousand crowns as ransom, the money being lent to him by Louis XI. of France. She died in France a few years afterward, in 1482.

We strolled on across green and luxuriant fields till we came to the Bell Inn, a curious and ancient hostelry, with peaked gables and black cross-beams, and a delicious shady bowling green. After luncheon we walked past the abbey, and took a look at the old gateway, with its angels projecting on the outer side and its gargoyles on the inner, and then strolled on down the High Street, admiring the quaint wooden houses, with their projecting upper stories and quarried windows, took a peep at the "Bear," with its queer signboard, and then went on to the bridge to see the confluence of the Severn and the Avon, and very pretty and picturesque it is, the two rivers running side by side for some way, only divided by a narrow vividly green field, where the sleek cattle feed; the splash of the weir, as it falls in a shower of silvery spray; the hoary old grey arches of the bridge, with peaked buttresses, coeval probably with the abbey; and a background of trees, and lanes, and gentle undulations, and further off of mighty hills, and over all the blue arching dome of heaven, flecked here and there with a fleecy white cloud.

Our last morning we spent in a visit to Little Malvern, where a Benedictine priory was founded in 1171 by two brothers, Joceline and Edred, in subordination to the parent house at Worcester. In 1538, at the dissolution of the lesser monasteries, this priory was granted to Henry Russell, Esq., of Strensham, and in 1734 passed by marriage to the Beringtons. Little Malvern Court is built upon the site of the old priory, and part of the original building has been worked up into the present mansion, with its quaint gables and tower. We looked with interest at the latter, for near the summit is a secret room, difficult of access, where no doubt many a fugitive has hidden in bygone troublous times. The church, originally Norman, was suffered to fall into decay, and was rebuilt in 1482 by John Alcock, Bishop

of Worcester. It is in the form of a cross, and from the centre rises an embattled tower, which is now covered with a tiled roof that gives it rather a comical appearance, and certainly looks sadly out of place, while the nave is gone, and other parts are in a state of decay. In the lower compartments of the eastern window are some figures, conjectured to be those of Elizabeth Woodville, queen of Edward IV., and some of the royal children. Afterwards we drove to the Rhydd, and then to see the ancient abode of the Lechmeres at Severn End, which was given to them at the time of the Conquest, and is a most interesting specimen of a timber-grained house, having carved barge-boards and ornamental brick chimneys. The oak panelling in the interior and the embossed ceilings are of the time of Henry VII., and are in a wonderful state of preservation.

We longed to linger in this old place, that bore everywhere the ineffaceable stamp of the past, but time pressed, so we drove back by way of Madresfield Court, the seat of Earl Beauchamp—a moated Elizabethan mansion, with an avenue of stately elms—and feasted our eyes for the last time on the beautiful views, and then, after a hurried luncheon, we drove off to the station, where we fortunately caught a through train that landed us in a few hours once more in smoky London, far, far from the great green Beacon Hills, and the clear bracing air, steady unclouded sunshine, lovely pastoral views, and all the sweet sights, sounds, and scents of the country.

An Episode.

CHAPTER I.

PRETTY Mrs. Sargent was ill at ease.

It was not often the fascinating widow had any cause for anxiety, and Clement Dalzell was the last man upon earth from whom she expected to find it.

She was a pretty woman, an exceedingly pretty woman ; however her friends might differ as to her degree of fascination, not one of them dared question her exceeding charm, or the beauty of her glowing dark eyes, ruby lips and perfect teeth. Moreover, she was decidedly well off. The late Sargent having left a comfortable provision for his attractive relict, she gave delightful little dinners, where the claret was heated to just the proper degree and the champagne iced enough to bring out its tone. That she was a woman with a history no one questioned, and as little did her nearest and dearest friends doubt the fact that there would be some few pages added to the record, ere time wrote his lines too deeply round the red mouth, or set his crow's feet in the vicinity of those expressive eyes. She had admirers by the dozen—that was only to be expected. A well-dowered, fascinating widow, without encumbrances, of course she had her following, but no man in London could say she had smiled upon him more than politeness dictated, except Clement Dalzell.

Now, Clement Dalzell was somebody. A rising barrister, with ample means, mothers and chaperones had angled for him for two whole seasons ; beauties smiled upon him, and bluff fathers—men quite above seconding their wives in matters matrimonial, or thought to be so—had invited him to shoot pheasants and fish preserved waters where salmon lay crying out to be captured. There was scarcely a country house, where there were daughters, that did not fling its doors wide to the clever young fellow who had inherited a tidy fortune, and was certain to mount to the topmost twig of the legal tree.

In the beginning of his third season of triumphant escape from the matrimonial market, he met Genevive Sargent.

She had been some years in London at the time ; her delightful flat, overlooking the park, made a most harmonious setting to her dark beauty. She wore good diamonds, dressed to perfection, and had the prettiest foot in the world. Then her ideas of men and things ran in the same lines as his own ; there was the faintest flavour of Bohemianism about her, and that suited him too. He might lounge in her pretty rooms, and if he occasionally indulged in a tiny cigarette she made no objection. In fact, she was a charming, unconventional woman, who laughed at Mrs. Grundy, while she still kept well inside the pale, and who was the most delightful company in the world. As to the deceased Sargent, he asked no questions. She told him her husband had been many years her senior, that her brief married life had not been all lilies and roses, and that, if she could meet a congenial spirit, she might possibly think of another union. But the spirit must be a very congenial one, and the circumstances in every respect desirable, before she could dream of resigning the liberty which had become sweet to her ; and Clement thought she was right to be careful. So it went on for nearly a year. The mammas who had marked down the young lawyer looked "all Sheffield" at the fascinating widow, when she appeared with the prize in her train ; and the prize seemed exceedingly happy in the company he had chosen—that was the worst of it.

But as yet, although there had been much confidence and a little—a very little—love-making between them, there was nothing in the shape of an engagement. Perhaps they were both too wise to venture upon anything definite before they were sure of themselves ; and Genevive was an exceedingly clever little woman. She was not in love with him, but had he suddenly drawn off she would have felt hurt ; perhaps more deeply than she herself imagined. Moreover, she knew the charm of philandering, and with a good deal of dexterity, contrived to treat the young man with a frank friendliness which held him fast. All this had been amusing her for a year, or a little longer, when the crisis she wished to keep off arrived, and the ardent youth almost compelled her to receive him upon a different footing.

"How much longer are we to go on like this, Jennie?" he said to her, as they sat together in her cosy boudoir. "Don't

you know that I love you, you tantalizing little woman? Don't you know that you are absolutely necessary to my happiness? Yet here you are, keeping me at just the same distance from you as I was last year. It isn't fair, Jennie, and you know it."

She certainly did look distractingly pretty that evening. She had on a yellow tea-gown, of some mysterious stuff that fell round her in folds, which an artist might go wild to copy, and in her hand she held a fan, gorgeous with the plumage of tropical birds, while the diamond pins which fastened her masses of lustrous black hair caught the fire-light, and twinkled like stars between the clouds of a dappled winter sky. Leaning forward and looking into her face, he could see her eyes grow misty through the wavings of her fan, and the voice which answered him had a low thrill in it which his heart beat quick to hear.

"Are we not quite happy?" she said. "Why should we alter a relationship which is so pleasant?"

"I want you for my wife," he answered. "Have you not known that all along?" He rose from his seat and approached her where she reclined in her deep arm-chair. "You must answer me one way or other, Jennie," he whispered, dropping on his knee at her side and obtaining possession of her hand. "We know each other so well; we are bound to be far happier."

She let her hand lie in his, but she drew back from the arm he would have cast round her. "I don't see it," she said. "My experience was not so perfect as to make me venture again, but"—and she dropped her fan to lay her hand lightly on his crisp, curling hair—"perhaps it might be different now. I am older and, I think, wiser; and you?—are you quite sure of yourself, Clement?"

"I am—perfectly certain that there is not another woman in all the world," he said hastily, as he drew her to him. "Jennie, you don't doubt my faith?"

Still with her hand on his hair, she whispered softly, "I do not know. Life is a strange medley. You may be very devoted to me now, but will it hold? Remember, I have had my experiences, and I have learned that even the hottest affection cools, and that it is a very rare description of love"—she made a little pause before uttering the word—"which will stand the stress of time. Clement, I have not much faith in men."

"I don't ask you to have faith in men," he said tenderly. "I ask you to have faith in one particular man—which is me."

"That's just it," she replied quickly. "If I put faith in you, and you fail me, what then? No, dear friend; best for us both that we remain as we are. Believe me, I am right."

"You are not right," he rejoined hotly. "Jennie, I believe you have a heart as cold as an icicle. If you had not, you would understand me better."

"Do you know, I think it is because I understand you so well," she answered. "Clement, a truce to this; let us remain upon the old footing, and be content with things as they are."

"That is a very hard saying," he replied. "Do you mean me to think you will not marry me, Jennie?"

She did not want him to think so, although she most certainly did wish him to believe she was not anxious on the subject. "He has been so 'rushed' by other women that I must teach him I am very different to the general run," she thought. Aloud she said softly, "Is it not better to preserve a tender friendship than merge a devoted friend in matrimony, which might convert him into a careless husband, Clement?"

"I don't understand you," he said bluntly, and he rose from his knee. "Jennie, you are an enigma."

She smiled up at him as he stood in the firelight, a handsome, well-bred young fellow, looking uncomfortable and perplexed at this particular moment, but, perhaps, all the better in her eyes: did not her power to annoy him show her perfect empire over him?

"Suppose I teach you the solution," she said, thinking how very handsome he was, and how sorry she would be to lose him. "Your friendship is very sweet to me, Clement."

"How you harp upon friend and friendship," he said testily. "Can't you drop the words, and call me by a dearer name?"

"You really know so little about me," she said. "I might be a mere adventuress, for all you know of my antecedents."

"Now—if any one but yourself said that——" he cried angrily.

"You would knock them down," she said, looking at him with undisguised admiration in her expressive eyes. "I'm not an adventuress. My money is safe in the respectable funds. I could tell you my whole history from my youth upwards, without reservation. There is only one action of my life which I look back to with so much as a blush and that is my marriage. A

girl of nineteen, I married a man nine-and-twenty years older than myself, for a home, and without an atom of affection. But I was only a child. I did not know what I was doing, and, in fact, I had no choice. I was told Mr. Sargent wished to marry me, and that was all. He was not unkind to me. He neither beat me or starved me—and he died. Poor man, it was the kindest action of his life; at least, that part of it which concerned me. I am very happy in these pretty rooms of mine. But you have made me think of—of, taking a new element into my life. I wish you hadn't, Clement."

She had risen to her feet as she spoke, and now they were standing side by side on the hearthrug, with the firelight playing fantastically over them, and only the murmur of the distant street to remind them there were any other lives in the wide world beside their own. He made a step nearer and clasped her to him. "Let me make up for the loveless years," he said, with his lips close to her ear. "Don't play fast and loose with me any longer. Say honestly that you will be my wife, and put an end to this shilly-shally, Jennie; we'll both be ever so much the happier for it."

Just for one brief moment she let herself rest upon his heart, and their lips met; then, with a long, low sigh, she drew herself away. "There would be so much to give up," she whispered. "We should both find it difficult:"

"No, no," he cried eagerly. "There would be nothing to give up compared with what we would gain. Come, Jennie, make me happy by a word."

It trembled on her lips, the monosyllable which would have changed her whole life, but at the moment the door opened, and her trim page announced, "Mrs. Witherby."

Clement Dalzell went away in a rage.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. WITHERBY was also a widow, but a lady of matured years, owning to eight-and-forty, with a daughter who looked nearly as old and several grandchildren. She had no household duties, no occupation, and took no interest in public affairs, centring her powers upon the interests and occupations of her neighbours. She was rather a trying person, and Genevive Sargent did not reckon her amongst her devoted friends.

"There, now," she said, dropping into the chair which Clement had recently abandoned, "I've frightened Mr. Dalzell away. Don't you wish me at the other side of nowhere? I'm sure if I had had an idea I was interrupting such a nice little *little-dittle*, I wouldn't have come in; but I just wanted to tell you that Mrs. Vere has been in trouble with her servants again—what a wretched home she must have, always fighting with her cook," and so on and so on, until Genevive could have torn the feathers out of her fan with sheer vexation.

"Now, about Mr. Dalzell," the visitor said, lowering her voice. "My dear Mrs. Sargent, did you ever hear how he treated Amy Lawrence, or how badly he behaved to Susan Watkins? He was all but engaged to *her*, you know. Used to go to her father's place for the hunting every winter, and let the poor child imagine he was devoted to her, while all the time he was corresponding with Amy Lawrence. I saw the letters myself, so there could be no mistake about it."

"None whatever," Genevive said dreamily; "I know."

"Oh, do you? I thought he would have kept it from you. I daresay he told you they thought of bringing an action for breach of promise against him?"

"But they didn't," Genevive said, with a slight ring of impatience in her voice. "And—have you heard from Mrs. Gore lately?"

"From Fanny? no; I don't expect to hear every mail. Poor thing, she has quite enough to do with all those babies, and it worries me to have her continual complaints."

"I often wonder you don't go to her," Mrs. Sargent said. "The climate is lovely, and the voyage not in the least trying. I'm sure you would enjoy it."

Mrs. Witherby stared at her hostess in something not unlike defiance.

"Me?" she cried. "Go to Australia?"

"Why not?" Genevive inquired innocently. "When your only daughter is there and, in broken health, is it not the most natural thing in the world for you to be with her?"

"Such a thing is out of the question," she replied sharply. "I never thought of it."

"Really! Now do you know I think that odd. If my only daughter was at the other side of the world, I would consider it

my duty to be—if not under her roof—and circumstances might not allow of that—at least within call: and you have such sweet grandchildren, you know."

Perhaps the pretty widow had lost her temper, but she could not possibly have made a worse "hit" at the lady than this mention of her descendants—also, the implied hint of disagreement with her son-in-law. In fact, the daintily-uttered little speech cut all round, and the lady laid it up in the recesses of her memory as a debt to be discharged in due time.

She did not, as she had intended, remain to dine with her friend, for Mrs. Sargent lighted a taper and glanced at the clock, with the remark that the Mudford Jukes dined at eight, and were rather particular as to the punctuality of their guests, which remark conveyed a hint, or something stronger, that the little lady did not wish her to stay.

Genevive was not going out to dinner, only she wished to be alone and have a quiet hour in which to meditate upon this change in circumstances which was being forced upon her. She had crossed the Rubicon. She knew she liked this man far more than she chose to acknowledge to herself, and she shut her eyes and thrilled. What if she consented and became his wife? The loveless years would be forgotten, or atoned. She might hope for peaceful days, shielded by the affection of a man who had chosen her out of a world of women—a man who had never cared for any one but her. There was something very sweet in that consciousness. As to these tales of Mrs. Witherby's telling, she knew what they were worth. That girl, Susan Watkins, had schemed and plotted how she could get him into her power; and as to Amy Lawrence, she knew the truth of that story too. She could trust him, and she would trust him. If only he came back now! He might know he was welcome; and it was not unlikely he would return. He often had returned before. But the slow hours drew by, and he did not come back; neither did he write, as she expected. The truth was that, upon leaving her, vexed at the turn things had taken, Clement Dalzell met an old friend, recently returned from India. The men belonged to the same club and were both young. They dined together, and after dinner lounged into a well-known home of gay burlesque; and John Mather having one or two acquaintances in the *corps de ballet*, they spent a pleasant evening. Mrs. Witherby went on to

another friend's abode. This lady was an invalid, who seldom left her room, but who was always delighted to hear and repeat the local gossip which was Mrs. Witherby's staple commodity. In half-an-hour they were discussing Mrs. Sargent's very marked flirtation with "that dangerous young man, Clement Dalzell," and by the following afternoon half that lady's intimate friends were speculating whether he would marry her—or she him. He came the next afternoon, but Genevive's rooms were filled with her friends, who looked significantly at one another and whispered little comments upon their probable engagement. It was impossible for him to outstay the crowd, as he had promised Mather to dine with him again, and perhaps again visit the charming troupe of damsels, who were so frankly pleased to see them—especially that charming blonde who sang the "patter" song, but whose blue eyes looked as if they had known tears.

The dinner was good, and the burlesque at the Hilarity improved upon a second visit; also, the pretty blonde with the pathetic blue eyes appeared far more interesting when he spoke to her the second time. She held aloof from the others, and took no part in their jests, neither did she remain in the merry company after her duties were fulfilled.

"Pity of that nice little soul," Mather said, as they walked away together. "She comes of a highly-respectable lot. Knew her when she was a nice little girl in her teens—before I went out to India. Her people are Nonconformists; she was well brought up; never would have seen the inside of a theatre—much less danced and sang in one—if her father hadn't married a second time. Second wife drew the cord too tight, and poor Tiny couldn't stand it. She ran off with a fellow in a cavalry regiment: decent lad—married her straight enough—but died in a year, and his people won't have anything to say to her. Her father, too, died about the same time. Step-mother took possession of every farthing, and won't allow her to have even her own mother's money. It's a hard case, and the creature hasn't the money to take proceedings against her step-mother or her father-in-law. She sings her little song and dances her dance to keep herself and her baby. Poor Tiny"—and John Mather sighed.

"But, surely she could get some one to fight her battle," Clement said. "I'm certain I could put her in the way of it."

"It would be the greatest charity in life," Mather said hastily.

"My dear fellow, she is just the nicest little creature in the world, and as straight as straight. She has all the proofs of her marriage—certificate and all that, and her mother's marriage settlement. The whole thing would be perfectly plain sailing to a man who understood such things. If it had been in my line, I'd have done it myself; but, you see, I'm not in the law, so my good intentions go for nothing."

"But I am in the law—and if I could help her——" Clement said impulsively.

"Look here! come round to her little place with me on Sunday afternoon. It's the only day she's free. You can talk things over with her, and see what's to be done."

Clement hesitated. Sunday had hitherto been devoted to Genevive, and how could he absent himself after that half admittal of her affection the other evening? But then, would not Jennie herself approve of his doing a chivalrous action, and helping a woman in distress? She would forgive him when he explained the circumstances. "I'll write," he thought; "that will be the best way."

So Sunday came round in due course of time, and Clement accompanied his friend to the small but very comfortable rooms which "Mrs. Eglantine" occupied, in a quiet street so far west as to be miles beyond the magic circle of the West End.

Her case appeared so simple to the keen-eyed man of law as to be a foregone conclusion in her favour. He told her so. She looked at him with eyes which swam in tears. "For baby's sake," she said, "not for my own, I thank you from my heart. I don't want my boy to grow up in the knowledge that his mother is singing low songs and dancing low dances upon the stage to feed and clothe him."

And Clement thought what a lovely thing maternal affection must be. Once he had taken the case in hand, he resolved to go into it thoroughly. To this end he made sundry excursions into the country, having more than one rather stormy interview with the starched step-mother, whose severity had driven his poor client from her father's house. She told him her husband had excluded his lost child from all participation in his property, regarding her as his great disgrace, and that he had absolutely forbidden all mention of her name from the day she quitted his roof. But Clement found out several discrepancies in the lady's state-

ment, and a valuable assistant was discovered in the person of a local solicitor, who had done business for "Tiny's" father in time past. Dalzell had not the slightest difficulty in making out a case of "undue influence," and, with all the professional side of his character awake and alert, he half forgot the attraction in that pretty flat overlooking the park.

Spring glided on. He paid his visits to Genevive Sargent much as usual, and although he became quite as confidential as ever with her, somehow or other he omitted to mention "Tiny," whose name was in reality Eglantine Yorke. He told Mrs. Sargent he was engaged upon an important case, and said that in her presence he wished to forget there was such a thing as business in the world.

CHAPTER III.

EGLANTINE told him her pitiful story. After all, it was a very simple one, but told in the stillness of a Sunday afternoon, with the disinherited baby playing on the hearthrug, and the sad, soft blue eyes looking so innocently from the child to the man who was helping her to right that child's wrong, Dalzell found it very interesting. Was it strange that he also found the shabby little room, with only a few poor cheap flowers to brighten it, almost as pleasant a lounge as that other dainty drawing-room, where costly exotics faded in the perfumed air, and where every chair was a perfect "Sleepy Hollow" for luxury? It was strange, too, that this blue-eyed woman, with her gentle, clinging manner and her almost childish reverence for his learning and ability, presented to his mind a far more feminine ideality than the beautiful queen who accepted his homage as her royal right.

Mather did not accompany him to the house in the far west now: he found Mrs. Sargent a far more congenial companion than the other widow, with her sad story and her low "cooing" voice; but he was loyal to his friend, and inside the walls of Mrs. Sargent's home, Mrs. Yorke's name was never mentioned.

But Genevive was ill at ease—Clement had been her bond-slave for so long that now she could not comprehend his defection. He came to her house, but with a woman's keen intuition she began to

"Know the change and feel it,"

long before she acknowledged the fact to her own heart. He

told her that he had staked his professional reputation on the winning of this case which was occupying his thoughts ; but when she asked him to explain the nature of the action that could so interest a man who usually took life very easy, he merely said it was a will case—entirely a family matter—something of no public interest—and talked of other matters.

So the days slipped by, and Mather improved his opportunities with the well-dowered widow, until Mrs. Witherby whispered to her most intimate bosom friends that " Really, she thought Mrs. Sargent was not behaving well—because, after all, she had encouraged Dalzell to throw over Amy Lawrence, and it was cruel of her to flirt with his friend." Some echoes of these remarks reached Jennie's ears and stung her, but she did not alter her manner to her new acquaintance, neither did she attempt to "draw" him with regard to Clement's preoccupation.

As the time drew near for the trial upon which the future of his gentle client depended, Dalzell became conscious of all the issues involved in it. Felix Yorke was a younger son at the time of his marriage ; now his elder brothers were dead, and if the marriage was substantiated—and he had little doubt of its being so—the boy, who was so dear to his gentle mother, was undoubted heir to a very respectable estate and the reversion of a title. The young lawyer held his tongue about this development of the case, waiting until he could speak with certainty.

In his devotion to the business he had in hand, he was constantly out of town, consulting the old solicitor, who was beating up evidence for him, and who, in a measure, had organized the case. Thus occupied, of course he could not accept half the invitations showered upon him, or even answer in due time the little notes he found piled upon his dressing-table upon his return from these excursions. At length the day of the trial came. "When it is over," he thought, "I'll tell Jennie the whole story, and get her to call upon poor Tiny. The little thing will want a good deal of coaching up in social matters before she can meet the Yorkes upon equal ground. Poor child ; she will be an apt pupil."

It never occurred to him that Genevive might be an unwilling teacher.

As he went to the courts he crushed a tiny note from Mrs. Sargent into his pocket. He just glanced at it, and, seeing it

was an invitation to dinner, resolved to send a telegram in answer later on, when his thoughts were less occupied than at the present moment, just as his colleague had given him an important bit of information with regard to the case.

It was a triumph from first to last, and when the opposite counsel had ceased to cross-examine the fair plaintiff, Clement knew her cause was won. But she was forced to return home, as the child was not very well, and the case went on.

"I knew we'd do it," the old solicitor said, rubbing his hands. "I congratulate you, Mr. Dalzell. You made the most telling speech I ever heard. I say, have you telegraphed to her? She'll be anxious to hear, you know."

But Clement knew what he meant to do; and through the glow of a brilliant sunset, he dashed to the shabby little house, which he told himself would be to let in a few days, because the money he had won for Eglantine Yorke was a very considerable sum indeed, and as the mother of a prospective peer, she must move into a better locality without loss of time.

* * * * *

Genevive Sargent put on her prettiest tea-gown; she had ordered a little dinner which would be a perfect poem in banquets. A bottle of '80 champagne was being iced to perfection, and some very choice Madeira, the cream of the deceased Sargent's cellar, was decanted. She had herself seen to the decorations of her dinner table, and now, with her pretty, luxurious boudoir looking a perfect nest of repose, she sat and waited.

"I was a fool to treat him as I did that evening," she thought; "it will not be difficult to let him understand that I—that I regret having pained him—and now that he has been working so hard——" She did not follow up that train of reasoning, but her mind went off at a tangent. What had he been working up with such devotion? What was the special interest which had drawn him so much away? She had never stooped to ask him, but she would ask him now. She would put away all her pride, and suffer her heart to speak—now—now at last; and with the thought she looked at the little clock on her dainty writing table. It was half-past seven; in a few moments he would be here, and then——. She let her head sink back on the cushions, and

suffered her thoughts to wander wide. Faintly, as through a dream, she heard the sound of multitudinous life in the street below, and, in the park beyond, a thrush was singing, while through the stillness of her room she could hear the ticking of the little clock upon her table. The sounds grew fainter and fainter; the walls of her room seemed to expand, then contract again, and the room she saw round her was poor and shabby. It was filled with evening light, and in it sat a woman with a child upon her knee. The woman was young and pretty, with fair hair, like the child's, and wistful blue eyes, which were fixed upon the door. She sprang to her feet, and put the child upon the shabby sofa, as the door opened and Clement Dalzell stood upon the threshold, his hands outstretched, his eyes glowing with pride and joy. The woman looked at him, her face upraised in ecstasy, her hands clasped upon her throbbing bosom. He advanced towards her, and took those trembling hands, while he appeared to speak earnestly and emphatically to her. She bowed her head and wept as she drew away from him. Then he cast his arms around her, and held her fast, as she lay weeping upon his heart. As he raised her face to meet his own, darkness closed upon them, and Genevive Sargent started from her trance as the clock was striking eight.

So short a time, so strange a revelation; but everything was made plain to her. She understood the whole matter. She had lost him, trifled with him once too often; and now another woman stood between them, and the happiness she had let slip was out of reach for ever.

* * * *

Next morning she had a brief note from him:

"So sorry not to have been able to dine with you to-night. Expect me to-morrow afternoon.

"Yours always,
"C. D."

She was so perfectly mistress of herself that when he arrived at four o'clock she met him with her usual smile.

"I am to offer my congratulations, I suppose," she said. "You seem to have made a very fine speech. You ought to have told me, because I would have gone to hear you speak. It must have been most interesting."

He was ill at ease as he replied that he did not like to see ladies in the law courts, but that if he had thought she would have cared——

"I thought you knew I cared," she said. "I am always interested in the fortunes of my friends," and she smiled upon him with the old brilliancy.

He thought after all this woman is the real mate for a man who wants to get on in the world, and made as if he would take her hand, but she swerved away.

"But your case was over early; at least, you could have come to tell me of your triumph in time for dinner," she said, still with her bright smile. "Where were you at a quarter-to-eight last evening?"

His embarrassment increased. "I? Oh, I went to tell my client," he stammered. "You see, she is very friendless."

"Ah!" the smile grew almost cruel. "And you had to go in person. Doubtless she was grateful. She is a charming person, is she not?"

"I don't know. She is a pretty little thing," he faltered.

"Affectionate, I suppose, and most grateful to you?" Genevieve Sargent could be merciless when she chose. "She was a dancer at the Hilarity."

"You read her evidence?"

"Not all of it, it did not interest me. So you went to her after you had won her cause? and she was grateful, flew to your arms, et cetera."

He looked wonderingly at her. "Who told you?" he stammered.

"No one told me; only deny it if you can. I saw you meet—saw it all as I sat here in this room—this chair. Everything was made plain to me, the secret of your extraordinary change," she reddened to her brow, "and I understand. You need not try to defend yourself. I am quite ready to acknowledge that I was in fault. I told you that I had not much faith in men; recent experiences have not taught me to alter my opinions."

"Jennie!" he cried passionately, "will you not be just to a fellow? Will you not give me a chance of speaking in my own defence?"

"There is no need," she answered icily. "I shall not forbid you my house—that would be making quite too much of an affair,

which after all is not of such consequence—but the old footing is destroyed."

He knew it was, as he went down the familiar steps and made his way to the shabby room in Hammersmith, where Eglantine received him as her beneficent Providence. It was not very wonderful that the man found in her child-like devotion and passionate gratitude healing medicine for his wounded vanity, and some consolation for the loss of that other woman, who married John Mather, and queens it nobly at the Residency in the Hills, where she holds her little court of Anglo-Indians.

Truth to tell, she was glad to get away from London, and the Mrs. Witherbys thereof, who vexed her with stories of "The dreadful mess poor Clement Dalzell had made of his life." But society has long since forgotten that the pretty woman who presides at the table, and who always looks so sweet and winsome, sang "patter songs" and danced at the Hilarity for her daily bread, especially since her boy is Sir Felix Yorke, and Clement is nursing his property to such advantage that he will be a rich man when he comes to his estate.

Has he ever regretted the step which parted him from that other woman? Perhaps not, but there are times when he feels that after all, although clinging affection is all very well in its way, a man with duties in life requires something stronger, and, possibly, had he to live his life over again, he would act differently. For Genevive Mather in her Indian home there are no more dreams. Her husband is her most devoted slave; but she has not yet forgiven herself for letting slip the chance of happiness which once lay in her hands, and which she threw away.

FLORENCE C. ARMSTRONG.

Into Temptation.

By A. PERRIN.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW WILL IT END?

"Had I a thousand souls with which to love thee,
I'd throw them all delighted at thy feet."—*T. Bowring.*

DR. HERRING reported that Andrew was certainly much better the next morning, though he would not own it himself, and insisted on staying one more day in bed, an idea which I encouraged, as I was afraid if he came out of his room I should be chained to his side the whole evening.

I hardly recognized myself that day. I felt dreadfully restless and excited, and so exercised in my mind as to how I could possibly manage to get out alone again that evening, that I made one mistake after another in a report Andrew was dictating to me, and could pay attention to nothing properly.

I had eaten no breakfast, and my hands were hot and shaky, and Andrew's temper seemed almost unbearable, so that when I was told that Chatty Herring was waiting to see me in the drawing-room, I laid down my pen and hurried off to her with the greatest relief.

"Well, dear old thing," she began at the top of her voice, "and how's Mr. Boscawen? Pa says there's nothing on earth the matter with him."

"Oh! hush, Chatty; he'll hear you," I whispered, then raising my voice to the level of hers I continued, "He's a very little better, and I'm dreadfully anxious about him."

Chatty stared at me for a moment, and then stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth, collapsed into a chair shaking with laughter.

"Don't be silly, Chatty," I said in my ordinary voice; "you know when people are ill they can't bear any one to say there's nothing the matter with them."

"Yes, of course," she said, sitting up and recovering her

gravity, "but it was the way you screamed set me off. Now, look here, this is what I've come about. Do you want to give the Christmas dinner?"

"It's impossible," I replied. "Andrew wouldn't be well enough, and if he were he said he would have to be away on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth."

"That's all right, then, because I want ma to give it, and I think she will because Sir Gerald came over this morning and said he'd be here."

So he was not going away after all. How glad I felt.

"Well," continued Chatty rising, "I must get back and tell ma, because she'll want to make her arrangements; of course you'll come, and Mr. Boscawen too if he's well enough."

"I hope so," I said, "but I'll let you know. Do you think Mrs. Herring would call in this evening and ask my husband herself?"

"I'll tell her," said Chatty; "but you *must* come. If ma makes gruel for Mr. Boscawen you ought to come to our party. One good turn deserves another, or if you prefer it put more politely, you scratch me and I'll scratch you."

And Chatty marched off down the drive, turning back once or twice to wave her scarlet parasol and kiss her hand to me.

I breathed more freely as I re-entered the house. Probably Mrs. Herring would come round about the same time as last evening, and I should have no difficulty in slipping out and meeting Gerald. I felt I must see him again to-day, cost what it might; and a horrible reflection crossed my mind that if I was miserable at the thought of missing him for one evening, what would it be when he was gone altogether?

Five o'clock came, and no Mrs. Herring. I felt as if I was going out of my mind, and kept looking out of the window towards the shrubbery to see if I could distinguish Gerald's figure waiting for me.

"Why can't you sit still?" grumbled Andrew; "you never seem able to settle. Just now you sat down to sew and now you're jumping up again. You won't have any sense for the next ten years if you go on like this."

"Here's Mrs. Herring," I cried joyously. "Now I am going out for a few minutes; I shall never be able to sleep if I don't get some exercise."

Without waiting for permission, I ran through my dressing-room, and out towards the shrubbery, paying no heed to Andrew, who was calling me vigorously to come back. What did I care how angry he might be afterwards if I could only see Gerald for a few precious moments?

I ran swiftly over the lumpy ground and found him waiting for me behind the bushes.

"I thought you were never coming," he said; "I got here soon after four, but I should have stayed all night if I had thought I should see you at the end of it."

I imagined him walking up and down all through the cold night, and wondered what he saw in me to consider me worth such discomfort.

"Chatty Herring says you are staying for their Christmas dinner?" I remarked rather awkwardly.

"I'm staying because you asked me to, not for the dinner," he answered half laughing.

"I didn't ask you to stay. And I think it's very mean of you to say such a thing."

"Josephine," he said gravely, "don't spoil the little time we have together by being cross with me. You *know* you want me to stay. Look straight into my eyes, and if you can tell me truthfully you want me to go away, I will go."

He put his hands on my shoulders, and I looked up at him and told him to go.

"Who taught you to flirt?" he asked, without moving his hands.

"I can't flirt," I answered, looking away and growing red under his gaze.

"Well, you are trying to, at any rate. Now answer my question properly. Am I to go? If you tell me to again, I shall do it; I never stay where I'm not wanted."

I made no answer.

"I'm waiting," he said.

Then suddenly, without any warning, he took me in his arms and kissed me passionately.

"Now tell me," he whispered.

I burst out crying for answer. I felt as if something hard within me had suddenly melted, and I clung to him, and begged him not to leave me. I believe I even kissed his hands, but I

cannot quite remember ; I only know that Gerald told me he loved me better than his life, and that I vowed that, come what might, I would love him till I died, and that I went back to the house feeling years older than when I had left it.

How was it all to end ? Why had I met him when we could not be happy together ? And how was I to go on living with Andrew after this ? All of which questions were utterly unanswerable, as I very well knew when I asked them of myself. There was nothing to be done but to live my life out as best I could, deriving what happiness I might from the knowledge that Gerald loved me.

I expected a scene when I got back, about my having left the house so abruptly, but found Mrs. Herring still sitting with Andrew, so he was in a fairly placid humour.

"Here she is," exclaimed Mrs. Herring. "Good evening, Mrs. Boscawen. I was nearly bringing Chatty down to see you, only we knew Sir Gerald would be at the club and want a game of tennis. So I told her to go and play, because I heard that Mrs. Argles came in this morning, and of course Sir Gerald wouldn't like to find himself obliged to play with a woman like *that*—so very different to what he is accustomed to."

"I'm very glad to hear Mrs. Argles is in again," I said recklessly ; I felt I could have defied man or beast without the least trepidation.

"How can you say such silly things, Josephine?" said Andrew ; "you know very well Mrs. Argles is not a friend of yours."

"I'm afraid I shall be obliged to ask her to dine on Christmas Day," broke in Mrs. Herring ruefully ; "I don't very well see how I can leave them out."

"Of course you must ask them, my dear Mrs. Herring," said Andrew grandly, "but I should give them to understand indirectly that you do it merely because a Christmas dinner is more of an official function out here than a gathering of friends, and you are *obliged* to have everybody. I wish I was well enough to do my duty and take the business off your hands."

"Oh, don't *think* of it," cried Mrs. Herring ; "I am really very glad of the opportunity of doing a little entertaining for my dear girl's sake. She must have some amusement, you know, and it's really a pleasure to see her in society, she has such charming

manners. I do hope when she marries, she will make a good match. I'm sure we shall give her every opportunity."

"I don't think you need have any anxiety on that score so far as we can see at present," said Andrew knowingly, who had interpreted Mrs. Herring's hints aright about Sir Gerald. And the ambitious mother bridled and smiled, and told Andrew he was much too sharp; after which she departed to pick up Chatty in the best of spirits, which must have been considerably damped when she found Sir Gerald had not been near the club to play tennis at all.

"Do you think you will be able to go to Mrs. Herring's dinner, Andrew?" I asked, when she had gone.

"I *think* so," he replied doubtfully; "at any rate, I shall try. I ought to be there as the Collector of the District, so I shall make a struggle. Mrs. Herring says she will let me off dressing, and will give me slops for dinner, so that I need have no fear. She certainly is the most considerate woman I ever came across, and I hope Daintry's brother will propose to her daughter before that detestable woman, Mrs. Argles, gets a chance of making eyes at him."

A sudden fear took possession of me.

Supposing Gerald should admire Mrs. Argles? She would be sure to put forth all her powers of fascination, and would he turn from my large figure and awkward manners to her dainty beauty and captivating ways? I did not doubt that Gerald loved me, but I was so mistrustful of my own powers of attraction, and I had such a genuine admiration for Mrs. Argles myself, that I felt sure I should contrast unfavourably with her.

I began to suffer the tortures of jealousy in anticipation, and lay awake that night for hours, crying my eyes out with mingled happiness and misery.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER.

"Now conscience wakes despair
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory
Of what was, what is, and what must be."—*Milton*.

THE evening of Mrs. Herring's Christmas dinner-party arrived. Andrew made up his mind at the last moment that he was well enough to go, and donned a very old thick suit, as he seemed to

have an idea that respectable clothes would be more conducive to catching cold than things that were appalling to look upon at any time, not to mention a dinner-party.

I wore my black evening dress for the first time, and came to the conclusion, when my toilet was completed, that I was looking my very best.

I had not seen Gerald since that memorable evening in the garden, for Andrew had requested me to go out driving with him for the last two afternoons, and I had no chance of leaving him for a second during the rest of the day.

I was in a great state of excitement at the prospect of meeting Gerald again, and I thought Andrew must have been almost able to hear my heart beating as we got out of the wagonette at the Herrings' door.

Everybody had arrived except Mr. and Mrs. Argles, and they entered in the middle of a loud assertion on Mrs. Herring's part, that she was certain "that woman was going to be late on purpose to try and spoil the dinner;" but though she must undoubtedly have heard every word of the remark, Mrs. Argles greeted her hostess with undisturbed serenity, and attached herself to Andrew with a charming smile on her face and mischief lurking in her eyes.

I could not hear what she was saying, but presently Andrew swung round with his back to his tormentor and began to talk to Chatty.

Two minutes after I had got into the room, Gerald made his way to my side. I had not seen him in evening dress before, and I thought he looked, if possible, handsomer than ever. The faultless cut and fit of his clothes, the white shirt, that had been washed and starched in England, making all the other shirt-fronts in the room look black beside it, his diamond studs, and the little bouquet in his button-hole, all helped to dazzle and fascinate me.

I could not help glancing at Andrew in his snuffy, dirty suit, and thinking how like a sick fowl he looked, with his shoulders humped up to his ears and an injured expression on his face as he described his illness and all its details to poor Chatty, who yawned in his face and tried to pass him on to some one else.

Then I looked up at Gerald, who was standing by my side in

all his glory, and I could have cried aloud in vexation of spirit at the hardness of my lot.

"It's ages since I saw you," he said, when the general buzz of conversation enabled him to speak to me without being overheard by Mrs. Costello, who sat in fat, serene silence by my side.

"I have not been able to go out alone since I saw you last," I said, playing with the fan in my lap, "and sometimes I wish I hadn't been able to go then."

"So do I, when I'm not with you. But it wouldn't have made any difference; there's a fate about these things."

Just then Douglas Daintry freed himself from Mr. Cassell, who was bitterly complaining of the way Government was treating him generally, and darted over to me.

"I haven't seen you for centuries," he said. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I haven't been out because Andrew's been so seedy."

"Of course. And a nice time you've had, I expect. Aren't men beasts when they're ill?"

"I've had so little experience that I don't like to commit myself," I answered laughing; "but I have no doubt you are right."

Gerald had turned away when his brother appeared, and I could see him fidgeting with a book on the table, wearing anything but a pleased expression on his face. Was he angry because I talked to Douglas? Surely he could not be so absurd. Perhaps he was a little jealous—and the idea filled me with a sense of triumph and elation. I could not help talking a little more confidentially than was necessary to Douglas, just to see if my supposition was correct.

So I listened intently to a most uninteresting account of one of his dogs having been run over, while I kept a watch on Gerald's face out of the corner of my eye, when presently, to my surprise and consternation, he shut up the book he was pretending to look at, with a snap, and deliberately crossed the room to where Mrs. Argles was sitting.

After that I could listen to nothing Douglas said; all I could take in was the fact that Mrs. Argles was looking up into Gerald's face with her innocent blue eyes very wide open, and that he was apparently giving his whole attention to what she was telling him.

A big lump rose up in my throat. I hated Mrs. Argles, I thought her hideous, and common, and everything that was vulgar and detestable; and my cup of misery was full when I found myself seated at the dinner-table between Dr. Herring and Mr. Costello, while Mrs. Argles floated into the room on Gerald's arm. Andrew had, of course, taken in Mrs. Herring, and was the other end of the table, perfectly happy, with a huge bowl of soup in front of him, and a screen at his back to shield him from any possible draught.

Chatty and Douglas Daintry were keeping up a running fire of chaff and laughter; Mrs. Costello and her relations had settled silently down to enjoy the dinner they had been eating for two days before in anticipation, while poor Mr. Cassell sat the other side of Mrs. Argles, who almost turned her back on him, so engrossed was she in her endeavours to fascinate Sir Gerald.

Mr. Pierce was there, but he sat further down on my side of the table, where I could not see him; and he had not attempted to speak to me that evening.

"Are you a vegetarian?" began Mr. Costello, as I refused both turkey and ham, and roast beef with an apology for Yorkshire pudding.

"No," I replied; "are you?"

"Well," said Mr. Costello with a sigh, "I am when I'm out in camp alone; and I'm sure it's much better for one."

"Why?" I inquired, though I took no interest whatever in the subject.

"It's natural to us," he answered argumentatively; "and you always notice how different it makes one look. Why, the finest race of men in the world are vegetarians."

Mr. Costello, who measured about five feet two inches in height, and was puny in proportion, drew himself up, and applied himself vigorously to two huge slices of beef which filled his plate. He explained, as he did so, that he never put forward his theories when he dined out, as it made people uncomfortable, and disturbed their arrangements if he ate large quantities of vegetables.

So, out of consideration for Mrs. Herring, he stowed away two enormous helpings of beef and any amount of game afterwards. Poor little man. I fancied, with so many mouths to provide for, his declaring himself a vegetarian was probably making a virtue of necessity.

Conversation with Dr. Herring was perfectly hopeless. He kept jumping up and down in his chair as the servants did one thing after another that displeased him. He waved his arms, and made signs, pointing at the various dishes he wished handed round, or at anybody he imagined had been overlooked, and abused the servants in a hoarse whisper every time they passed his chair. He worked himself up into a state bordering on frenzy, and I was quite glad when we rose to leave the room that we had got so far through the evening without his bursting a blood-vessel.

Nothing would do when the gentlemen joined us in the drawing-room but that Chatty must have a dance.

"We're quite enough," she cried boisterously; "and the drugget is beautifully tight. Now, ma, go and play your one waltz."

The tables and chairs were pushed to one side, and, delighted that Chatty's dancing should be seen and appreciated, Mrs. Herring bustled to the piano, and thumped out an old-fashioned waltz which did very well to talk to, though it could hardly have been called pretty.

I waited breathlessly to see what Gerald would do. He was still standing by Mrs. Argles when the music began, and my heart sank like a stone when I saw him put his arm round her waist and whirl her off.

"I don't wish you to dance, Josephine," said Andrew, coming up behind me. "You must be ready to come away soon, as I cannot sit up late. You will have to make the move, being the principal lady."

Luckily, Chatty overheard him.

"Oh! Mr. Boscawen, she *must* dance," she exclaimed, pausing in the act of starting off with Douglas Daintry. "We have so few ladies, we can't spare her. Now, really, you *can't* refuse to let her dance."

"Well," said Andrew unwillingly, "I suppose I can't say no, so I'll dance with you myself, my dear, though it's years since I've done anything so foolish."

"Aren't you afraid of its knocking you up?" I asked, though I would just as soon have danced with Andrew as any one else now Gerald had left me for Mrs. Argles.

"I can manage a turn," said Andrew, so we skipped and hopped round the room, colliding with each of the other couples in suc-

cession, till at last we paused breathless and exhausted by the door.

Andrew was quite delighted with himself.

"Dear me," he said, mopping his forehead; "I thought I'd forgotten how to dance. We got on capitally."

"Don't you think you had better go and ask Miss Costello, Andrew?" I suggested. "She's sitting all by herself, poor thing."

To my relief he went off to make himself agreeable to the lady in question, and though they did not dance they walked about arm in arm, Andrew propounding his pet theories, and Miss Costello listening in humble admiration.

I went into a little passage that led off the drawing-room and was dimly lighted by a small lantern, and sat down by myself. I was almost crying with mortification, and felt very much inclined to take advantage of my privilege as "principal lady," and break up the party at once.

However, there was just a chance that Gerald might come to me when the dance was over and explain matters, so I sat still and listened to the jingle Mrs. Herring was making on the piano, and the scuffle of the dancers' feet on the floor-cloth.

Presently somebody came hurriedly into the little passage. It was Gerald, and I felt sure he was looking for me.

"I'm here," I said quietly, from my corner. He was at my side in an instant.

"They're all changing partners, as the old person refuses to stop playing for a moment, so I came to look for you."

"Oh, don't let me keep you," I said acidly. "I'm not going to dance any more."

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Josephine, you're jealous," he cried, with a triumphant little laugh, and taking my hands, he pulled me from the chair on to my feet. "Come out here."

He pushed aside a thick curtain that hung in front of an open door, and we stood by ourselves in the dark verandah.

"Have I punished you enough?" he said softly, putting his arm round me and drawing me to him; "you *know* you tried to tease me, now didn't you?"

"Gerald," I said, freeing myself, "I wish I had never met you."

"Honestly and truthfully?"

I made no answer, and he again tried to take me in his arms.

"We *can't* go on like this," I cried bitterly. "I feel so wretched. I *know* I'm doing wrong."

"No, darling, not really. You can't help it if you love me as I love you. It's not your fault, it's your misfortune. Listen, Josephine," he went on; "you must promise me something."

"What?"

"You never know what may happen in this world, and I want you to promise that if ever you are in trouble or have need of me that you'll send for me. I'll come to you wherever I am."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. You are to send for me if you want me. Do you promise?"

"Yes," I said in a whisper.

"Very well; that's all I ask, except that you won't be silly, and try to make me jealous, because two can play at that game, can't they?"

"You played it fairly successfully to-night," I answered resentfully.

"Never mind, darling, I won't do it again. We ought to go back or we shall be missed. Won't you kiss me just once? Do it of your own accord. I won't take it from you if you'd rather not give it to me."

He waited, with his hands clasped round my waist, while I hesitated, and at that moment somebody came round the corner of the house with a lantern, lighting up the verandah, and exposing us in this attitude to the gaze of Mr. Pierce, who was walking close behind his servant, evidently on his way home.

In a second we had started apart, and he had gone swiftly by, but I knew he must have seen us, and I returned to the drawing-room in an agony of shame and terror.

What would happen if he told Andrew or any one else? And, at any rate, even if he held his tongue, what must he think of me himself?

I said good-night as quickly as possible, and got home in a miserable frame of mind. Having been found out was opening my eyes to what I was doing, and the depth of the precipice that yawned before me.

Up till now I had taken nothing into consideration but my own misfortune in being tied to a man I almost hated, and having met the man I was to love when it was too late to be happy with him. But now I began to reflect that I had lost my self-respect, that I was doing Andrew a bitter wrong, which he could never overlook if he knew of it, and that I was in truth, what Mrs. Herring had perhaps called me, "a thorough bad lot." I had been wicked and deceitful, and there was nothing too bad for me, but how could I help loving Gerald? I had never meant to do so, it had come upon me so suddenly, and surely there was a great deal of excuse for me. I had never loved any other man, or thought of such a thing, and my life was anything but a happy one. Andrew did not understand me, and gave me no chance of being happy as his wife. I had never known what it was to be cared for tenderly and lovingly, and how could I turn away from such love when it had come to me at last? I felt it was all I lived for, and I shuddered as I thought of the coming days when Gerald would have to leave me to fight my battle alone.

The thought of Mr. Pierce also worried me. I felt as if I could never look him in the face again, and, added to this, I was not at all sure that he would keep what he had seen to himself. Perhaps he would think it his duty to warn Andrew, and whatever Mr. Pierce considered his duty, he was pretty certain to carry it out. If he told Andrew I should probably be sent home to Aunt Addie with only sufficient money to keep me, and if there was a scandal, how dreadful it would be for Gerald. I remembered all Douglas had told me of his brother's horror of publicity, and I felt I would do anything to spare him annoyance, even go to Mr. Pierce, and throw myself on his mercy, making a clean breast of the whole business.

I thought, and thought, until my brain seemed to whirl, and at last, before I got to sleep that night, I had made up my mind that, cost what it might, I would beg Mr. Pierce to keep my secret the first opportunity I could get.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JUST FOR THE PRESENT.

"Then let come what may,
I shall have had my day."

To my great relief the opportunity presented itself the very next morning.

Andrew had had his tea and toast in bed after the previous night's dissipation, and while he was dressing I went out into the garden to see if there were any flowers worth picking. While I was there I caught sight of Mr. Pierce coming up the drive, and I at once jumped to the conclusion that he was coming to tell Andrew what he had accidentally discovered. Without waiting to consider I hurriedly advanced to meet him, and boldly opened fire at once. I knew if I waited for him to speak first, or if I hesitated for a moment, my courage would fail me, and I should turn tail and fly before his face.

"What have you come for?" I asked quickly, the words shaking as they passed my lips.

"I wanted to see your husband," he answered, looking over my head.

"What about?"

"About some work. I'm going back into camp to-morrow. I know what you are thinking of, Mrs. Boscawen, but I'm not going to do that."

"Oh, Mr. Pierce," I cried with a sob, "what must you think of me?"

"Poor child! I'm awfully sorry for you."

The words went straight to my heart, they rang with honest sympathy and kindness.

"Oh, I'm so wretched," I said. "Won't you help me and give me your advice? You know what you saw last night, and if I tell you all about it, perhaps you won't think me worse than I really am; you seem so good and strong-hearted."

Mr. Pierce smiled.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken," he said, in the nasty, sarcastic voice he used sometimes; "but you may trust me implicitly, and I must say that, having seen what I did last night, I think you would be right to tell me more."

We paced up and down the gravel walk, and I told him all. How my life had been cold and loveless as long as I could remember, with no one to care for me, and necessary to nobody up to the time I had met Andrew.

How I married him, tempted by the prospect of a life full of interest and comfort, with something to live for and a luxurious home of my own. Of the disappointing realization of that life when I discovered that I had married a soured, narrow-minded man with no thought save for himself, and his one aim in life that of saving money for no reason or object.

How Gerald had crossed my path just when my bitterness and discontent had been aggravated more than ever by the weeks I had spent in camp, and how I had given way to my love without a struggle so sweet had it seemed to me.

Then how I had suddenly realized that my new-born happiness was a sin even to think of, and how I was even then struggling to know what I ought to do and how I was to act.

"Yes, I understand all you tell me," said Mr. Pierce when he had heard me to the end. "You did not know what you took upon yourself when you married a man you did not love; that you had forfeited the right of ever loving any one else. The very love you craved for, you shut out of your life by your own act."

"I know now," I said bitterly.

"You won't take my advice if I give it you."

"Indeed I'll try."

"Then send that devil back to England."

"He's not——" I began indignantly.

"Now, hear me out," interrupted Mr. Pierce impatiently. "Putting aside all considerations of right and wrong, nothing but misery can come of it all round if he stays. The whole thing will probably end in the divorce court. There can only be the greatest deceit and hypocrisy on your part, and your peace of mind and self-respect are worth everything to you if you would only believe it; you are too young to throw them away so carelessly. Be a brave woman; if you do what you know is right you'll never repent it."

We turned round at that moment and saw Andrew advancing to meet us from the house. I escaped as quickly as I could to my room and sat down to think over Mr. Pierce's words. Of course I knew he was right, but it was so hard to have to send Gerald from

me; to deliberately destroy with my own hand all that brightened my life. I knew perfectly well he could not stay on in Kuttahpore for ever, but the cold weather was not nearly over, and I might see him every day for two months more. Douglas was coming into camp with Andrew, and Gerald had intended accompanying us with the excuse of shooting and experiencing a little camp life.

At any rate I was safe with Mr. Pierce. How lucky it had been he who had come round the corner of the house and no one else. Somehow, now I was sure he would not betray me, I did not feel nearly so wicked as I had done before, and I finally decided that I would wait till I saw Gerald again before making up my mind to send him away altogether. I saw him that afternoon, for Chatty Herring drove up to fetch me for a game of tennis at their house, and of course he had been invited too.

"I had such a row with ma this morning," said Chatty as we got into their trap. "I worried her till she promised to make Mr. Boscawen let you go to the ball."

"Oh, Chatty, how did you manage it?"

"I just said I wouldn't go unless you did, and that brought her round. She's going to tackle him this evening and ask him to let you go with us."

I very much doubted whether she would succeed in obtaining his consent, but hoped for the best, and could not resist indulging in a mental vision of myself dancing with Gerald in a real ball-room to the strains of a regimental band.

I got no opportunity of speaking alone to Gerald until late in the evening, as Mrs. Herring gave him no peace, continually contriving that he and Chatty should be together, and when she could not manage this she fastened *herself* on to him, and talked incessantly of her daughter's charms and attractions.

At last Chatty reminded her mother that she had promised to go and see Mr. Boscawen.

"You know what about, ma," she said relentlessly, "and mind, you're not to come back till he's said yes."

"You are staying for the ball, are you not, Sir Gerald?" asked Mrs. Herring somewhat anxiously.

"Oh, yes," he said.

"Well, you won't see *me* at it," said Chatty decidedly, "unless Mrs. Boscawen comes too, and that's flat."

"Oh, my dear Chatty," said her mother helplessly, "you are so obstinate. I'll do my best to persuade Mr. Boscawen; I'm sure I'd do anything to please you, my love."

Where Chatty's wishes were concerned, Mrs. Herring was little short of imbecile, and she obediently trotted off to beard my husband in his den, leaving Chatty to entertain myself and Sir Gerald.

Just then Douglas Daintry rode in at the gate, holding a telegram in his hand.

"Here's a beastly sell," he said dolefully. "The collector's just sent me over this wire to tell me I'm transferred. Now I shall miss the ball. I do feel sick."

"Where's it to?" asked Gerald carelessly.

"Lucknow. That's rather a good business, but I shall have to leave in such a hurry; you see I've got to be there on the first, and I did want to go to this ball. I haven't even got joining time."

"If you're off in such a hurry," said Chatty, "won't you come and see my new pony?"

"You're an unfeeling girl," said Douglas, and they started off together for the stables, teasing and laughing at each other the whole way.

"What are you staring at?" I inquired, for Gerald had been watching me intently for the last five minutes.

"Are you sorry he's going?" he asked. How jealous he always seemed of poor Douglas.

"Yes, of course," I replied.

"Do you think you will be able to come to this ball?" he said, drawing his chair closer to mine.

"I'm very much afraid not. You see Andrew is sure to want to go into camp about the second, and he would never hear of my staying behind for it. Besides he's flatly refused to let me go at all."

"Never mind. I shall ask your husband to let me come out into camp, even though Douglas won't be with you. I could raise a tent somehow."

"Gerald, I'm sure you ought not to come."

"I know that. But I don't always do what I ought."

"Gerald, would you go away if I asked you to?"

"No, certainly not."

There! I had asked him to go, and he had refused. What more could I do? I could not help it if he persisted in staying, and I argued myself almost into a belief that I had done my duty in trying to send him away, and that now I was clear of blame in the matter if he stayed on.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I was wishing you would go away altogether."

"Then you won't get your wish. I don't mean to go away. I must stay and console you for my brother's absence."

He laughed, and placed his hand lightly on mine.

"What did you think of me when you first saw me, Josephine?"

"I don't know. I think I made up my mind that you were conceited and horrid."

"What ages ago it seems, doesn't it? I shall never forget what a jump you gave me when I saw you; you looked like a princess, so composed and stately."

"What did you expect?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I expected something of the Mrs. Argles type."

How glad I was to hear him speak of her in such a disparaging tone.

"Well?"

"Then, when I saw you, my darling, I knew you were the only woman in the world for me. Josephine, do you know I'd give ten years of my life if I could be married to you for one."

"Oh, *don't*," I cried. "You make it so hard for me when you say these things, and I'm so wicked to listen to them."

"I suppose I ought to have held my tongue and gone away without telling you. I ought really to have started for England by last mail, my mother's been very ill."

"Oh, Gerald dear, *why* didn't you go? How very wrong of you."

"Oh! it's all right," he said carelessly. "They said they'd telegraph if she got worse, and as that was three weeks ago and I've had no telegram yet, there can't be much the matter."

Then we sat in a silence that meant volumes to us, with my hand clasped in his, till we heard the sound of Chatty's voice returning with Douglas from the stables.

We all started off together at her suggestion to meet Mrs.

Herring and hear the result of her interview with Andrew, and met them both in the road just outside the gate.

"Well?" began Chatty, rushing forward.

"Mr. Boscawen thinks it would be most inconvenient to stay in the station so long for the purpose of your going to the ball," said Mrs. Herring severely to me, for she held me accountable for her daughter's obstinate behaviour in the matter.

Andrew was looking very cross, and every hope of being able to go seemed to be extinguished.

"It appears to me that you are very unreasonable, Miss Chatty," he remarked. "I cannot understand why you wish to force my wife into going to this nonsense."

"I'm not going without her," said Chatty stoutly, "and if it's only the staying in the station that matters, she can come to us while you go into camp."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Herring, catching at this suggestion, for she had set her heart on Chatty going, having made up her mind that Sir Gerald would be sure to propose at the ball; "we should be very glad to take her in, and if you, Mr. Boscawen, are going out on the second, you could march in the direction of the railway station, so that she could join you easily afterwards."

To my amazement Andrew gave an unwilling consent, and it was all settled then and there.

"Mr. Boscawen tells me your brother is transferred," said Mrs. Herring, addressing Gerald, "so when he goes you had better come to us too, and then we can all go to the ball together. We will do our best to make you comfortable."

Mrs. Herring waited in breathless suspense for Gerald's answer. Here was an opportunity which might never occur again. Once she got him into the house to stay, the game would be practically won.

I knew all that was passing in Mrs. Herring's mind as plainly as if she had spoken the words, and her look of triumph and satisfaction when he accepted the invitation with alacrity, was beyond description.

Andrew was very cross with himself (and me too) for having been persuaded into giving his consent to my going to the ball.

"I don't like it at all," he said angrily after we had got home. "I strongly object to married women going to balls and things

of that description, and I should never have agreed only that we owe Mrs. Herring a debt of gratitude for all she has done."

"Indeed we do," I said cordially, wondering what it was she *had* done.

"It seems that that wilful spoilt girl of hers refuses to go to the ball without you, and Mrs. Herring expects Daintry to propose at it, so she's naturally anxious for her to go, and I feel I am doing her a kindness in allowing you to do so; but please understand that it is *quite* an exception, and only because I could not refuse under the circumstances. At all events I must beg you won't dance when you get there."

This was a very trying command, but I knew so very little would be sufficient to make Andrew retract his unwilling permission altogether, that I meekly promised what he wished, and carefully avoided the subject of the ball until he had gone into camp.

I had given up all idea, for the present, of persuading Gerald to go away. With the ball in prospect the temptation was very strong to say nothing more on the subject, and I yielded to it. An extra week could not make much difference in the present state of affairs, and when the ball was over I would consider the future seriously, and force Gerald to leave me by refusing to see or speak to him if he stayed on in the station or came out into camp with us.

And so I stifled my conscience, and tried to forget Mr. Pierce's words, and gave myself up to the one week's blissful happiness in Gerald's society, which I determined should end once and for all with the ball.

In the long dull years that I should have to face, at any rate I should have one bright spot to look back upon, and at least one taste of happiness which I might live over again in my imagination.

(To be continued)

The Little Duchess.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

By R. M. NIEDERHAUSER.

NOT alone little men but little women also are often great tyrants, as instanced by the Duchess of Maine. More domineering spirit never dwelt in a smaller body. Her eldest and tallest sister, when full grown, was just the size of a ten-year-old child. Anne Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon, born in 1676, was grand-daughter of that illustrious Prince de Condé, who fought many battles and confessed he loved his neighbour's wife as well as his own. Her father, Monsieur le Prince, *tout court*, was small, spare and fallow, with flashing eyes, remarkably clever, but peremptory, capricious and erratic. During a fortnight he would start morning after morning for Fontainebleau with his wife and invariably turn back ere he had reached the end of the street. Four dinners were constantly prepared in four different towns without its being known which of them would be eaten. In modern parlance, M. le Prince was a street angel, affable and brilliant in society, extravagantly lavish to his numerous mistresses, but bearish and proverbially parsimonious at home. His plain, crooked little princess—an angel of meekness and forbearance, but dull as such angels sometimes are—was a mere puppet, pulled hither and thither according to his whim, sad, gay, silent or talkative to order and without daring to inquire why. No sooner were his four daughters marriageable than they pined to get away. Her cousin de Conti took pity on the eldest, and the next died early of a decline, because the Duke of Maine, whom she had hailed as her liberator from paternal bondage, chose her younger sister, Anne Louise. The tiny princess lived in an age when princes were deities. Inordinately proud of being a Condé, she considered her union with the sickly, club-footed bastard—he was the second of Louis XIV.'s nine children by Madame de Montespan—little short of a *mésalliance*. But the fifteen years old Anne Louise, like her clever father, was keen and far-sighted. The

wealthy and timid duke would make a pliant husband, easily ruled. Madame de Maintenon, his fond governess, since her elevation, had steadily advanced his interests with the grand monarch. Legitimized at her instigation, then allowed to adopt the name of Bourbon, he continued to rise in favour. In the looming distance, Anne Louise pictured her august little person adorned with a queenly crown, ascending the grand marble staircase at Versailles, and seating herself with her spouse on the throne of the most Christian kings. The delicate duke, naturally retiring and studious, a regular bookworm, would fain have led a quiet life, but fate and circumstances were against him.

In spite of his partiality for this son, Louis XIV. gave a reluctant consent to his marriage. "People of his class should not marry," he replied to Madame de Maintenon's pleadings for her darling. Already the king saw the inadvisability of prolonging a bastard line; besides, the ill-shapen duke was scarcely fit for matrimony. Nevertheless, on March 18th, 1792, a grand "apartment" was held at Trianon in honour of the bridal pair, and graced by Louis XIV., who had scarcely ever appeared at these "at homes" since his union with Madame de Maintenon. The young pair were married in the chapel at Versailles at 12 a.m., and allowed to retire in peace after twelve hours of ceremonies, courtesies and compliments. Next day the newly-made duchess lay on a state bed in full gala costume and received the court. Then followed a week of uninterrupted festivities, which so fatigued the child-bride that Madame de Maintenon became seriously alarmed. So far she was delighted with the match. The duchess was pretty, fascinating, witty and, doubtless, would submit to her guidance. She was mistaken: her *protégée* meant to keep her own counsel and only follow her own inclination; court etiquette, she soon concluded, was even worse slavery than home discipline. Ill or well, sad or gay, weary or fresh, a court lady must always be to the fore in gala costume, *décolletée* and bare-headed, even travel in this apparel and expose a smiling face to dust, wind and sun. She must eat, drink, endure heat or cold at the king's pleasure, dance, sup heartily, sit up all night, always looking bright and well at the hours appointed by his majesty. Travelling was the worst of all trials; Louis XIV. delighted in filling his capacious coach with elegantly-attired women and ample provisions. Being fond of fresh air, the

windows were opened and curtains drawn at all seasons. Scarcely *en route*, every one was expected to eat, and eat all day long, no one alighting from the carriage except the king. On arrival supper was served as usual ; any lady daring to faint was irrevocably disgraced. Madame du Maine's mind was promptly made up. Regardless of etiquette, she played truant to official evenings, moral conversations at Madame de Maintenon's, excursions in the royal carriage and—worse still—neglected mass and the long sermons which, since Louis XIV.'s conversion, were the reigning fashion. She had terrified, and trained her timid husband from the very first. His meek comments on her unseemly conduct evoked such torrents of abuse from the little duchess ; she so publicly dwelt upon the great honour conferred upon him as the husband of a Condé, that he retired completely into his shell and obeyed her slightest whim in the hope of avoiding further squalls and storms. Even the king, before whom all else trembled, refrained from daunting this spirited young person, "who," remarks Madame de Caylus, "having proved incorrigible, was allowed to go her own way."

Nothing in her chubby, dollish face and infantile demeanour revealed the deep designing woman, whose daring intrigues and cabals kept her contemporaries on the alert. "Her temper," declares Madame de Staal-Delaunay, her faithful maid and companion in good and evil fortune, "was capricious ; her dark and lively moods succeeding each other with incredible rapidity, and for no apparent cause. She talked fluently and to the point, but never listened. Unreasonable, like all passionate beings, she was moreover a monster of self-love and egotism. She believed in herself as in God and Descartes—blindly and implicitly."

The little duchess on her wedding day had resolved to pursue two aims in life—her own amusement and a foremost rank, in spite of her husband's equivocal birth. The second she imagined was a mere question of time and properly directed efforts. Goaded on by her, the duke was not devoid of ambition, and would get on under the wing of his protecting genius, the puissant de Maintenon. To enjoy herself, however, seemed more difficult. Since Louis XIV. had turned virtuous, Versailles was decidedly dull, the courtiers consumed with *ennui*. Mme. du Maine might have settled at Clagny, a magnificent property, presented to her husband's mother, the Marquise de Montespan,

in sinful but merrier days. Unfortunately Clagny was at Versailles, near the king, who must be avoided. She preferred Châtenay, a modest country house near Sceaux, belonging to the duke's late tutor Malézieu, one of those wits with whom noblemen of the period surrounded themselves to supply their own intellectual deficiencies. He passed for an inexhaustible fount of learning; his every word was law; his verdict put an end to the hottest discussion. A man of many parts, he taught the duchess Latin, astronomy, explained Descartes, organized her incessant *fêtes*, and generally rendered himself indispensable. The Golden Age was revived, rural simplicity extolled at the expense of hollow pomp and vanity. For all that, the dinners at Châtenay were sumptuous and enlivened by pastoral music; the evening hours beguiled by grand fireworks, superintended by the indefatigable Malézieu.

A little later the Duke of Maine, wishing to humour his exacting wife, bought the princely castle of Sceaux, built in the nobly magnificent style of the day, with vast grounds laid out in symmetrical flower gardens, groves, fountains, cascades, canals, long straight avenues stiffly and geometrically divided. Valuable paintings, sculptures and costly furniture adorned the castle, which commanded an extensive view of one of the prettiest Parisian environs.

For the nonce the duchess imagined herself a real queen and, increasing her court, proceeded in earnest to the business of making merry. The ingenious Malézieu recruited paid wits—admitted only after due examination—to sing the merits of their patroness in prose and verse. The feast of reason was perpetual, the guests' brains for ever put on the rack. They ignored the blessing of one hour's comfortable dulness. Rondeaux, triolets, virelays had to be improvised, riddles solved, piquant or sentimental letters and poetical invitations answered in the same strain, and intellectual lotteries taken part in, *volens volens*. Such was life at Sceaux every day, all day and half the night. No wonder it was nicknamed "the galleys for wits." The duchess worked harder than any of her guests. Acting was her special hobby, and she learnt all the important rôles in vogue. A born princess and a Condé to boot was bound to excel in whatever she undertook. She underwent months of the drudgery of a provincial actress ere giving her grand representa-

tions, to which the real court was duly invited. The spectators applauded loudly, but laughed in their sleeves to see a princess before the footlights. As to the poor duke, keenly sensitive to ridicule, he fumed secretly, but dared not remonstrate, henpecked as he was to the extent of being sometimes excluded from his wife's entertainments, and sent to a turret, where he busied himself drawing plans for his gardeners. Alas! incessant toiling and slaving in pursuit of pleasure could not ward off from the duchess the terrible bugbear of the great — *ennui*; in her case aggravated by insomnia, to beguile which an ingenious abbé originated the famous "*Nuits blanches de Sceaux*." These nocturnal entertainments consisted of far-fetched, spun-out allegories, interspersed with comic scenes and songs, glorifying Mme. du Maine's transcendental graces and virtues, and representing her as Venus, Juno, Minerva and other deities. At dawn the whole castle was still on foot, and the festivities ended with a sumptuous breakfast, at which the professional wits were ordered to sparkle. The serious studies, far from being neglected, had received new impetus since the handsome and insinuating Cardinal Polignac had been adjoined to Malézieu as professor of philosophy. He spent long hours closeted with the little duchess to explain his then much admired Latin poem, "*Anti-Lucrèce*." Of course, evil tongues gossiped freely about these lessons, but, as Mme. du Maine stoutly declared, she was a Condé, and above *les convenances* and low suspicions. Nor were her political intrigues allowed to slumber. Believing her plunged in a vortex of dissipation, the duke for once dared to indulge his own tastes by translating Polignac's famous poem into French verse, and proud of this feat showed it to his better half. "You will wake one morning to find yourself a member of the Academy and M. d'Orléans regent of France," was all the praise he received from his termagant wife. She wronged him, for he worked quite as hard as she did, and more cautiously. Doing violence to his retiring disposition, he scarcely left the aged king's side, flattering, comforting, cheering him with witty anecdotes, overwhelming him with proofs of filial devotion. To Mme. du Maintenon, whose tender solicitude never wavered, he confided his hopes and plans, humbly asked her advice and guidance, thanked her modestly for every fresh token of royal favour, and showed his gratitude by redoubled zeal at matins and vespers.

By a strange fatality Louis XIV's numerous legitimate family had died prematurely one after the other, and the heir-presumptive was a great-grandchild in arms, so sickly that he was not expected to live. In 1714 the aged king proclaimed his bastard offspring—the Duke du Maine, his brother, the Count of Toulouse, and their descendants—successors to the throne. Shortly afterwards he transferred the regency from his nephew, the Duke of Orléans—purposely blackened in the public mind as having poisoned several of his royal cousins—to his favourite son, the Duke of Maine. His proud duchess was jubilant; he divided between hopes and fears. His father's words on the day the royal will was signed haunted him: "You wished this," the grand monarch had said in a loud harsh voice, "but remember that whatever power I invest you with, you are nothing after my death, and it will rest with you to obtain your claims—if you can!"

On August 23rd, 1715, the fast sinking king ordered his son to review the troops, to accustom them to their new master. The falsely-accused Duke d'Orléans appeared on the scene with a regiment; instantly du Maine's brilliant *cortège* left him to follow his rival. He swallowed the affront, and on the 25th obtained a codicil from his dying father, who breathed his last on September the 1st. The next day the assembled Parliament read the will, and with one blow crushed the duke's fond hopes. In the morning radiant, a king all but in name, the evening saw him utterly crestfallen, a mere schoolmaster. Will and codicil had been unanimously annulled, and d'Orléans proclaimed regent under loud cheers from the same crowd which three years previously had threatened to stone him to death. The superintendence of Louis XV.'s education was all that was left to the Duke of Maine. His wife, in a paroxysm of rage, vowed she would never trust any one again, least of all her weak spouse. Henceforth she would fight alone. If her just privileges were to be disputed by the law, she was ready to defend them by that same law. She and her court had left Sceaux for the Tuileries in order to keep the little king under her eye. Farewell to Latin poems, intellectual games and all the muses! Poets, wits and professors, including the zealous Malézieu and handsome Polignac, were turned into scribes and lawyer's clerks, and from morning till night waded through huge volumes, deciphered

obscure, illegible manuscripts, ran over endless files of papers, searching everywhere, even amongst the ancient Chaldeans, for precedents of the case in point. Mme. du Maine, buried in her bed under mountains of musty folios, took notes, drew up memoirs, combined, invented, reasoned. At night it was Mme. de Staal who took her turn at the old chronicles and modern laws. When they had argued and debated till all brains fairly reeled, a dependant had to put the little duchess to sleep by telling her stories, whilst the others were allowed a few hours' rest. As usual, the underrated husband worked in the shade. He was an adept at sowing discontent and reaping its benefits. The new regent, more intent on his own pleasures than the weal of France, gave little satisfaction, whilst the gentle, deferential, insinuating du Maine won many hearts, which daily increased his party. In vain. For once might and right were on the same side and the famous lawsuit was lost. In July, 1717, a decree from the Council of Regency deprived the bastards of their succession right and the title of princes of the blood. A Bed of Justice, in August, 1718, reduced them to simple peers, and discharged the Duke du Maine from his tutorship to the young king. Two strokes of the pen had sufficed to rob a loved son of all the privileges showered upon him by the most absolute of monarchs. Already the old order was changing.

The terrible blow nearly distracted Mme. du Maine. On being told she must leave the Tuileries that very day, she screamed and they carried her off in a state of complete prostration, resembling a trance. Three days later she was transported to Sceaux, her fits alternating between complete silence, with fixed eyes—a statue of sorrow—and ungovernable rage, which she vented on her husband, reproaching him with his birth, his cowardice and their marriage. "The poor man," remarks St. Simon, "wept daily like a calf."

Such a defeat would have cured any other woman but the duchess. Nothing loth, she plunged headlong into Cellamare's famous conspiracy, whose object was to secure the French throne for Philip V. of Spain in case of Louis XV.'s death, and, in the meantime, to depose the debauched regent. The duchess's share was only an episode in the vast plot which later brought about a war, and she had read too many novels, played too many theatrical rôles to act a part in real life with the needful circum-

spection. All her movements were ostentatious and calculated to attract the attention of the police. One of her special conspirators was arrested on the road to Madrid with a bundle of compromising papers, manifestoes, plans and other day-dreams composed by her. A second, carrying still more dangerous documents, was caught at Nemours and locked up in the Bastille, where he hastened to confess all he knew and even more.

The duke and duchess were arrested simultaneously on the 29th of December, one at Sceaux, the other in Paris, and on this occasion behaved in a manner consistent with their opposite individualities. M. du Maine was leaving his chapel when a lieutenant respectfully begged him to step into a carriage. The duke obeyed, pale as death, but without sign or murmur, his hands folded and sighing all the while. He was taken to the citadel of Doullens in Picardy. His attitude on the road never varied; he groaned, said his prayers, occasionally crossed himself at the sight of a church, but volunteered no remarks, asked no questions. It was the same in prison. When questioned, he meekly protested his innocence and ignorance of his wife's cabals. When speaking of her he raised his voice, declared he had done with her and would never, never see her or even hear of her again. A few books, but neither ink nor pen, were at his disposal, unless he asked the jailor, to whom he was obliged to show what he wrote. He remained impenetrable, and compromised no one else, although he quaked with fear and expected any moment might be his last.

Madame's arrestation was quite another scene. She had just fallen asleep after a night spent in composing a memoir in her defence. She took four hours to get ready under many a violent passage of arms with M. le Duc d'Anenis, whose painful duty it was to fulfil the law. At last he led her by the hand to her own door and pointed to two hired carriages. New outburst. What! she, a Condé, step into such a vehicle! She had to submit at last and, under the care of Lieutenant La Billarderie, was conducted to the citadel of Dijon. The journey lasted several days, during which she played the tragedy queen so effectively, that her keeper, a kind-hearted individual, and not accustomed to real princesses, melted considerably, and did his utmost to attenuate the hardships of travelling. The good-natured regent allowed the proud culprit to share her mild prison with a maid-of-honour,

a companion, doctor, an almoner and five chambermaids. She was soon removed from Dijon to Châlons, then to a country house, where she was allowed to receive visitors. This time her spirit was broken. She no longer posed as a heroine, but showed herself what she really was—an old child weeping for its toys; weeping from morning till night. The regent wished to finish the farce, but without compromising his dignity. He offered a general pardon on condition of an open confession. The little duchess had to submit. She tried to exculpate her husband—as an afterthought!—by confirming his ignorance of the conspiracy, but took care to add as the reason of her concealment, that a man so timid was capable of revealing all, from sheer fright. The Duke d'Orléans was sufficiently avenged on husband and wife, and the prison doors opened for every one.

The *faithful* Malézieu had already confessed and been released. Polignac, merely banished, got a compensation, but sulked with Sceaux to the end of his days. Madame de Staal-Delaunay refused to speak. She was in no hurry to leave the Bastille, where two lovers courted her, and she enjoyed a liberty and comfort never before experienced. The Duke du Maine took the opportunity of ridding himself of his troublesome wife, and signified to her that henceforth she might live alone on a modest pension. He ignored her power. Six months later he was back at Sceaux, and at her feet, keeping the accounts and trying to check her extravagance. Madame du Maine had made her peace with her enemy the regent by leaping into his arms and kissing him on both cheeks.

At last plots, intrigues, ambitious dreams were at an end, and the old life of innocent pleasures and intellectual games once more resumed. Malézieu's lusty songs filled the air with joyous echoes; shepherds and shepherdesses again peopled the groves and avenues at Sceaux. The duchess's new *inamorato* was less dangerous and compromising than the handsome Polignac, for he was blind and had lost the use of every limb, but possessed the advantage of making her appear young. She had better still: Voltaire, at loggerheads with the authorities, remained hidden with her for two whole months. By day he wrote "Ladig" and other tales, which he read to her at night. The nights were delightful. A second visit from the philosopher with Madame du Châtelet, "his divine Emilie," seems to have been

less successful. The lady was fussy, exacting, and remained closeted with Voltaire till 10 p.m., the one "describing noble feats, the other commenting Newton." On a third occasion there was an open quarrel, and the illustrious guests left hurriedly, but Voltaire, who never neglected useful friends, made his peace later.

The years went by, but life lost none of its zest for the little duchess. She had found time to turn religious, and took a friendly interest in her guests' spiritual welfare. One by one her friends joined the great majority. Their disappearance spoilt a pleasure party, a rehearsal, or some other festivity, but they were speedily forgotten. Why not? since they could no longer amuse their patroness. Malézieu was one of the first to go, then followed du Maine, who died of cancer, faithfully tended by his wife, but equally soon dismissed from her mind. At seventy-seven, Madame du Maine still led a gay life, still gave way to caprice and violence, very unbecoming in the whilom dainty doll, now developed into a blowsy, coarse, tallowy dwarf. As of yore she suffered from insomnia, and expected to be distracted by stories. She rouged extravagantly and spent hours before the mirror. Finding it more beneficial for her digestion to dine quietly she gorged alone, and provided the scantiest of tables for her visitors. Destouches, one of her last guests, escaped clandestinely as from a prison. She died on the 23rd January, 1753, of a catarrh, which choked her. Not a poetical death for the "nymph of Sceaux." Thus ended this strange little creature, consistent in two things only—belief in her own greatness and a love of amusement at all costs.

Sybil: A Pastoral.

By W. KEPPEL HONNYWILL.

"YOU will be true to me, Sybil?" The speaker is Hubert Dashwood, a votary of art. Ere yet starting on his search for that rare treasure, "fame," he has discovered another, to him almost as valuable, in the person of Sybil Hamilton. On the morrow he leaves Highborn, their mutual birthplace, bent on a tour through Italy.

They are seated alone in a little boat upon the winding river—the inhabitants of Highborn describe it as such, although in reality it is but a stream, a small tributary of the Thames—the setting sun lights up the girl's olive face, which is turned towards Hubert, as he rests on his oars and gazes upon her with the eyes of a lover and an artist.

The picture needs no finishing touches. It is perfect. The pretty little oval face peeping out from beneath the broad-brimmed straw hat, the dark hair waving carelessly beneath, stirred by the evening breeze, the small hands toying with the white yoke-lines, and the look of dumb sorrow in her expressive eyes.

"You will be true to me, Sybil?" he says questioningly.

A solemn look passes over the upturned face as she makes answer, "For ever." Then, flushing slightly under his earnest gaze, she grasps at a water-lily lying upon the bosom of the loitering stream.

"Sybil," he says, as though only half-assured, "will you swear to be true to me?"

She moves slightly, but keeps her eyes bent upon the water rippling between her fingers.

"Do you doubt my word, Hubert?"

"No, little one, but I should prefer it if you would swear it."

She looks up in his face now, as she replies seriously, "If I were capable of breaking my word I should also be capable of breaking my oath."

"To please me, will you not? . . . It will be something for me to look back upon when I am fighting my way to fame and wealth in a foreign land."

"I swear to be true to you, Hubert," she says softly.

Hubert does not break the spell of silence, which seems to him almost sacred, after the vow made by the woman he loves, in those low, sweet tones, but plying his sculls causes the boat to shoot swiftly down betwixt the rows of willows, which dip their branches in the water, bending downwards and sighing softly, seeming to echo back those words which he will treasure up with him on his journey in search for the fame which, with the sanguine temperament of youth, he feels firmly convinced that he will find ere many years have passed away.

The sun sinks below the horizon, as the boat is ably steered round a sharp bend in the stream, and slowly draws alongside a rustic landing-place.

Springing lightly out on to the wooden jetty, Hubert secures the boat, and assists his companion to alight.

"The sun has gone," he says, "our day has ended, and all will be one black night to me, until I come to you with fame and wealth, my sweet."

"Our day has ended," she repeats mechanically, as though she is saying a lesson, and then she suddenly places her hands upon his shoulders, raises herself on to the tips of her toes, and for the first time kisses him voluntarily upon the lips.

"My darling," he says passionately as he clasps her to him. "You will not be influenced by your aunt when you go to her for your promised season in town? You will not be coerced into a marriage with some wealthy eligible?" There is a tinge of scorn in his voice as he dwells upon the last word.

"Hubert!" reproachfully. "I have sworn to be true, and have not even asked you to seal the compact by pledging yourself to me, and—and—you are unjust."

"Forgive me," he pleads, as together they stroll up the gravel path between the sweet-scented rose trees. "I can hardly bear the thought of parting from my little one for so long, and I feel so sure of my own faithfulness." Then with a sudden burst of impetuosity, he grips her almost fiercely by the arm, so that she winces with the pain. "I swear to be true to you, Sybil, till death, and if love can last beyond the grave, even then."

They pass through the open French windows into the little drawing-room, where Mrs. Hamilton is reclining upon the sofa—she is a confirmed invalid—with an open letter in her hand. She greets Hubert kindly. Mrs. Dashwood and she have been friends for many years, their two only children having been brought up and studied together, no other families of their own station in life residing within four miles of Highthorn.

"Sybil, my dear, here is a letter from your Aunt Louisa, who wishes you to go and stay with her, and make your *début* in London society."

Sybil glances at Hubert's face, which has assumed a stern expression, and answers, "Yes, mother," wearily.

"To-morrow," she continues, "you had better pack your trunk, as she wishes you to go to London on the following morning by the 9.40 train. Her carriage will be at the station to meet you upon your arrival."

Hubert stands in the rapidly darkening room, tugging at his moustache as though he would pull it out by the roots.

"Perhaps you had better take Sarah with you, and I will endeavour to manage with one servant in the meantime Take all your frocks, and if your aunt deems it necessary for you to purchase any more at Nicholson's, by all means get them I do not wish you to be stinted in anything that may conduce to your being a success You ought to be, as I once was—" this with a little sigh of mingled pride and regret—"one of the beauties of the season."

"Yes, mother," she answers in the same weary tone.

Mrs. Hamilton does not mind conversing before Hubert Dashwood with a certain amount of freedom. Perhaps, to-night, she has an object in so doing, wishing to show him how utterly useless it will be for a penniless artist, whose future appears so obscure, to hope to win her daughter's hand. She has secured her daughter's promise not to write to him during his absence from England, and she has great faith in a London season as a panacea for heart-sickness. Besides, does he not leave Highthorn to-morrow *en route* for the Continent, probably to remain abroad for years possibly for life? Doubtless, they have said their good-byes to-night—a kiss, a sob, a helpless complaint against fate, and all is over. Doubtless, distance, and change of scene and life, will do the rest. She does not judge her daughter's

future actions by those of her own past, for *she*—and she constantly bemoans her past “folly,” as she terms it—married her late husband, impoverished Captain Hamilton, for love.

As the housemaid enters the quaintly-furnished little room, with the shaded lamp in her hand, Mrs. Hamilton notes for the first time her daughter's white pallid face. The little mouth seems drawn, and there is a look of weariness in her blue eyes, which is not good to see in woman's eyes.

“Child,” she says almost peevishly, “you have been out too long. The evenings are chill, and the air becomes damp directly the sun has set; you should be more careful of your health.”

“It is cold, very cold,” whispers Sybil, in an almost inarticulate voice, as though she felt the words would freeze in her throat.

Hubert closes the window. “Good-bye, Mrs. Hamilton,” he says. “I shall be crossing the Channel this time to-morrow, and, as you know, shall not see old England again for several years.”

“*Bon voyage*, Hubert,” she says, extending her wasted hand; “you will forgive my not rising. I wish you prosperity and happiness.”

“Thank you,” he makes answer. “I trust you will be fully recovered long ere I return . . . Good-bye . . .” and then he turns to leave the room. Sybil is already awaiting him in the entrance hall. He takes her in his arms and kisses her again and again.

“My poor little darling, they want to sell you like a piece of furniture to the highest bidder.”

“Hubert, I can't bear it . . . to have to live with that horrid old woman, Aunt Louisa, with her enamelled face and mercenary ideas . . . it will kill me . . . and I shall never see you again . . . never again . . . And I may not write to you . . . Oh, Hubert. . . . Hubert.”

“It will not be for long, my darling. I shall be stimulated by the knowledge that when I win fame I shall win you also. Besides, *I* have not promised that I will not write to you.” He speaks hopefully, trying to cheer her. Moreover, he honestly believes that he will succeed in his efforts to make a name for himself.

“You will write?” she questions, stroking his fair head caressingly.

“Constantly”

Then their lips meet in one last long kiss they cannot trust themselves to speak It is that silent grief, so intense, so deep, which causes a choking sensation in the throat as though the breath has no outlet and the heart must burst.

Hubert pushes her from him, and striding blindly through the doorway, leaves her gazing out into the starry night with straining eyes, which striving to pierce the future see no light ahead Nothing but blackness and despair.

"Can I bear the test?" she asks herself "Can I withstand that detestable old woman's arguments? For Hubert's sake" Then she closes the door softly and returns to the drawing-room.

* * * * *

A whole decade has passed away. Life to all intents and purposes is the same as ever it was—neither better nor worse. Yet to Hubert Dashwood it seems very different. He tells himself that he is a cynic. He says that he has crushed all love, all pity and kindliness, out of his heart and that ambition, pride and selfishness have usurped their place.

He is standing brush and palette in hand in his studio at Highthorn. His mother died shortly after his leaving England, and, upon his return, he chose to come down to his old home for quietude so that he might the more easily devote himself to his idol—art. He has won that fame which he has struggled through poverty and privation, and alternate hope and despair, to attain. He has made his name, has built up his fortune—and yet, although he will not acknowledge it even to himself, something is wanting. Sybil Hamilton, now Sybil L'Estrange—he grinds his teeth and a look almost satanic in its scorn passes over his face as he dwells on the name—is dead to him; cut from his life as though she had never held a place in it. Yet, wish it as he may, he cannot cut her from his memory She broke her vow whilst he was still struggling, against odds which at times seemed overwhelming, to carve his name where so many cleverer men than him had failed to chisel theirs. He has genius undoubtedly, but it is coupled with dogged perseverance, without which few artists or men of letters have succeeded in life, although fame has sometimes come—long after death. Hubert often questions whether he would have had courage to continue plodding on, fighting through every obstacle, but for the thought of the

other prize he meant to win, which, when it seemed within his grasp, he found that he had lost.

"A broken vow! Bah! What is that to a woman!" he said to himself. And from the day that he heard of the marriage of Sybil Hamilton to Arnold L'Estrange—a wealthy man—he judged all women by this biased standard, and avoided their society as much as possible, consistently with the work he had to perform.

He is standing at his easel putting the finishing touches to his latest picture, touching it now here, now there, with a master hand. A little more crimson tipping the clouds round the golden sunset which is struggling through the willows, a deeper shadow on the water underlying the bank, a smoother touch on the dimpled chin of the girl reclining in the stern of the boat, her hands clasped together, her lips parted as though in speech, her eyes shooting forth a glance of loyalty and love. And yet, withal, a look of deceit appears to spread over her features—individually they indicate a character true and "pure as the purest star"—collectively they are false and lying. Her companion! What of him? He is leaning on his oars, bending forward eagerly to catch each word that falls from the parted lips. It is finished. The conception does not reach his standard—the idea does not seem original, but the expression upon the faces is such that Hubert Dashwood alone can give. No critic would need to peer into the corner for the signature, or to consult his catalogue for the painter's name; one glance at the expressions would be sufficient: "Ah! a Dashwood, beyond doubt!" It is his intention to send it to the Royal Academy—he has not a doubt as to its being hung The title—strikingly in accordance with the varied expressions of the woman's face—is "A Woman's Wile."

At length, he lays down his palette and brush, and steps back with inclined head for a final view. Apparently satisfied, he smiles a hard smile, almost fierce in its depth, then lighting a cigar, plunges his hands into his pockets and, striding to the window, gazes out upon the familiar landscape wherein the winding river—which he has portrayed on the canvas—peeps out between the trees in little silver streaks, at irregular intervals, as it flows murmuring on to greet, and mingle its waters with, the Thames.

He is startled out of his reverie by the door being thrown open and the servant announcing: "A lady wishes to see you, sir."

Ere Hubert has time to inquire who the lady is, a thickly-veiled woman, tall and graceful, enters. He turns and bows as to a perfect stranger.

"Hubert!" she says, raising her veil as the heavily-curtained door closes behind her "Hubert!" her voice is unchanged, sweet as ever she stretches out both her hands towards him imploringly—a gesture that he remembers well. How pretty and coquettish he used to think it in the old days that are dead and gone; only the memory still lingers, seared as with iron brands upon his heart. "Hubert!"

"Surely this cannot be Sybil?" he says to himself, almost doubting his own reason Is it Sybil? or is it but a horrible travesty of her? Surely this thin spectre, this shadowy form, is not the woman for whom he would have gladly laid down his life—aye, and sold his very soul—ten years ago?

"Hubert!" she falters, for she sees no welcome in his hard eyes.

With another courteous bend of his kingly head, which he had thrown back after the manner of one sitting in judgment upon a criminal, he pushes forward a costly chair and motions with his hand for her to sit down.

Verily time has not laid his hand so heavily upon Hubert as upon her. Her face is already lined with care, her hollow cheeks wear a hectic flush, and dark rings—which no powder can effectually hide—encircle her still brilliant, captivating eyes.

"To what, madame," he speaks almost disdainfully, "am I indebted for the pleasure of this visit?"

"You are hard, Hubert," she says.

He stands with folded arms, awaiting an explanation.

"I—you know that my husband and I are staying for a week or so at the old home."

He bends his head again slightly He *did* know only too well, but makes no answer, merely looking at her inquiringly.

"I felt that I must see you, Hubert; I have wished to see you for so long—so long."

The old love-light gleams for a moment in his eyes; the smouldering flame—which has so long lain dormant—leaps up in

his heart to the exclusion of past pain and wounded pride, but only for a moment Are the agonies of the past years, the embittered nature of a once genial and popular man, and the fierce—though perhaps false—pride of a cynic, to be broken up and cast ruthlessly aside, because she who caused them comes to him with sadness in her eyes and pleadings on her tongue—comes to him broken in heart and in body? No, a thousand times—NO. Has he not alternately cursed her and prayed that such a day might come? He sets his teeth tightly and speaks in his former impassive manner.

"Can I be of any service to Mrs. L'Estrange?"

She hardly dares raise her eyes to his: "I have come to beg your forgiveness."

All her old high spirit has gone now. In the old days how quickly she would have resented the studied politeness and courteous words, which failed to conceal so palpable a sneer.

"Let me hear you say," she pleads, "I forgive you, Sybil."

"For calling? I have nothing to forgive. I am, on the contrary, honoured by madame's condescension."

"Hubert!"—how sweetly she speaks—"You *know* for what I desire forgiveness. I—before God, it was not my doing. I was driven into it. Driven until I had no more strength for resistance. They told me that my mother could not live unless she went abroad. We were too poor to go. It was my happiness or my mother's life. And so—and so—I married for *her* sake."

"Your husband, madame," he interrupts, moving his arm with a foreign gesture, which he had acquired abroad, "does he know of your calling here?"

She shudders at the mention of the name. "Hubert, he is killing me! He says that he is *tired* of me!"

Hubert's face softens. *She* has not profited by her broken vow. And this man, her husband, is cruel to her! She looks so ill, so worn and weary, and she has loved *him* throughout. He is strangely moved.

"Sybil," he says, dwelling for a moment on her name, "consider your reputation, consider the scandal there would be, were it known that you had come here secretly The world is hard, aye, and gladly would trample on a woman's fame; it would mean your social downfall. For your own sake—go back."

"I do not care for the world, nor for the world's opinion of me," she makes answer. "I am happy now that I have seen you. I never wish to set eyes upon that man again. God help me, I *cannot* go back to him."

The temptation is strong within him; he knows that he still loves this woman, this wreck of his old love. "Why should I force her to return to this man? He does not want her and does not deserve her. He is killing her gradually In twenty-four hours we might be upon the Continent. She would be happier with me. She would regain her wonted health and spirits—and I should lose this constant gnawing pain." Thus he reasons within himself. Then pulling himself together with an effort, which costs him more than he cares or dares to estimate, asks: "Did any one beside my servant see you come here?"

"No," she says, "not any one." Then it dawns upon her why he asks. "You—you are not going to send me back to him?" she pleads.

"For your own sake—yes." And she sees no sign of relenting in his eyes. Raising her head, she espies the picture upon the easel. For a moment he thinks that she is going to faint, but she walks steadily towards the canvas and looks closely at the faces painted there. She had hoped, had thought, that his old love had not died within him. A low cry involuntarily bursts from her trembling lips; it is an exceeding bitter cry—that tells of a soul in pain. It is only another dreg in her cup of affliction. She has made her bed, she must now lie upon it, she tells herself. Hubert takes her by the hand and leads her to the door. She goes submissively as a little child. He gives her some directions as to the way she had better take across the fields, so that she may not be observed, but cuts himself short suddenly: "You remember the path as well as I do," he says half-angrily.

"I remember the way as well as you," she repeats softly. Her sweet eyes are tearless, clear as two summer stars, yet there is a look of pain in them that cuts him to the heart.

"Good-bye, little one." He presses her hand, and for one brief moment touches her gold-brown hair.

"Am I forgiven?" she asks again, feeling with a thrill of joy the caressing movement of his fingers.

He bows his handsome head and says, "God bless you, Sybil."

He dares not trust himself to kiss her. He feels almost mastered by a wild desire to clasp her in his arms, but restrains himself, knowing that—his honour, her honour, would be scattered to the four winds of heaven, and that he would never permit her to leave him, as he now commanded her to do.

Hubert stands at the window and watches her slim figure as she crosses the meadow so brilliant with buttercups and cuckoo flowers watches her till she passes beyond his sight. He thinks of her husband, and wondering what manner of man he is that can be cruel to *her*, a curse struggles to his lips, so deep, so awful, that the very mastiff shudderingly raises his glossy head from the tiger-skin rug and gazes with great blood-shot anxious eyes upon his master.

"My poor little one, you have suffered even more than I have done," Hubert murmurs. He walks unhesitatingly towards the fireplace, selects one of the many curious daggers which are artistically arranged above the mantel, and approaching his easel savagely cuts the canvas, which he had smiled so grimly upon only an hour previously—from end to end, from corner to corner, until nothing but mangled strips remain. Turning round he perceives a dainty little glove lying upon the chair which Sybil L'Estrange had occupied. Looking at the mastiff half-shamefacedly, he presses the tiny article to his lips and reverently places it in the pocket of his velveteen coat.

* * * *

Hubert Dashwood walks recklessly up and down the little garden path which fronts his studio, thinking over the occurrence of the afternoon. His house stands upon a wooded hill and commands a view of the late Mrs. Hamilton's residence. (For Sybil's mother died at Mentone within six months of her daughter's marriage.) Hubert strains his eyes to catch a glimpse of those chimneys now. Are they not reared above *her* head? To him they are as sacred as crowns of gold might be. But the night is dark as pitch, and he can scarcely see his own hand stretched out before him. As he impatiently puffs ring after ring of tobacco smoke from his carefully-coloured meerschaum, he wonders at the self-control he displayed when Sybil told him of her husband's cruelty. "It was for her sake, for her good name that I was firm and cast the devilish temptation away from me," he keeps repeating to himself.

He looks across the valley once again, and espies a lurid light gleaming fitfully in the meadows beyond. "Some bonfire," he mutters, and turning round, strides up and down again. A few more turns and he is forced to stop once more. The flames are rapidly increasing in volume; they are shooting upwards, lighting the very sky.

"My God!" he shouts hoarsely, as the truth flashes upon him, "it is a house on fire!"

Madly he dashes across the lawn, heedless of the flower beds with the peonies and tulips all in bloom, and leaps the thick-set blackthorn hedge at the bottom of the garden with the agility of a trained athlete. Across the fields he skims, spurred onward by one thought—"HER house! HER house!" His brain reels under the strain; it seems as though it too is on fire.

As he nears the scene of the conflagration he knows that his fears are realized; that it is only too true. A crowd of helpless labourers stand outside the doomed building, pointing to one of the bedroom windows, some suggesting one thing, some another, all equally futile, as a means of escape.

There is no fire-engine, the nearest station being four miles distant. The house will be completely gutted ere they can arrive with their hose. The flames are issuing from all the windows; the lead is running hissing in boiling streams from the roof; the air is scorching.

"Is everybody saved?" Hubert asks one of the bystanders breathlessly.

"I reckons there bean't much chance for the one as ain't," replies the man stolidly, with a wise shake of the head.

"Fool!" Hubert shouts. "Is any one in the building?"

The man jerks his hand in the direction of the window to which they had been previously pointing. "Aye, sir, a woman," he says.

Hubert stops to hear no more; he is already madly shouting for a ladder. The only one upon the premises has been burnt in effecting the rescue of Mr. L'Estrange and one of the servants, the former of whom is rushing wildly about, fretfully asking when the fire-escape will arrive.

Buttoning his coat close around his chin, Hubert—to the ring of a faint cheer—dashes into the hall and is lost to view in the dense and ever increasing clouds of smoke. He tries to ascend

the stairs, which are already falling, but is beaten back by the fierce tongues of flame. Feeling himself becoming stifled, he retreats scorched and blistered, and sinks upon the turf without.

"I didna expect to see thee alive agen, master," says the man to whom he had first spoken, who now comes to him with a mug of water.

Hubert drinks with the avidity of a shipwrecked mariner who has been adrift without fresh water for many days upon the ocean. Nerving himself for a fresh effort, he dashes the mug upon the earth. "Have a blanket ready," he says, and disappears from the man's view round an angle of the building. He remembers it well, every stick and stone, and makes direct for a pipe on the wall. He clutches it in his hand and attempts to shake it. It is firm as ever. It bore him as a boy, when he scaled it in quest of a bird's nest in the yellow jasmine—will it bear him now?

The flames roar and hiss, above the roar of anxious terror-stricken voices, and the roar of the winds which fan the fire.

Like a cat Hubert Dashwood climbs. but there is scarce room for his fingers between the pipe and the wall, and there is no holding for his feet. His hands are torn and bleeding—still he ascends, while an excited throng cheer him on from below.

Upwards, still upwards. only a foot more to scale. The scalding lead falls hissing upon his upturned face. he feels sick and faint, and almost lets go his hold. The little crowd of human beings hardly dares draw breath. One more foot. The blood tingles and surges once more in his veins. He nerves himself for the final effort. His teeth are tightly clenched, and his muscles draw up into hard knots, as though they would burst the skin that contains them. The flames roar and hiss continuously. Half his task is accomplished. His hand is upon the window-ledge. A ringing cheer bursts from the throats of the group of people beneath, as he disappears through the window—into the blinding smoke—but he does not heed it.

"Hubert! Hubert!" her beseeching voice of the past afternoon seems to ring again and again in his ears. He feels that she is calling for him now. "I am coming, little one," he calls aloud through the dense columns of smoke. He gropes his way

half stifled, into the bedroom beyond. His eyesight is dimmed; his faculties are deadened. He reels against the smouldering door-post.

Stay! What is that white object before him? A woman's form, with tresses of gold-brown hair falling over the pure white breast and shoulders, clad in a night-gown, lies motionless upon the floor of the chamber. The smoke has almost suffocated her. It is Sybil lying there—so ghastly white—so deadly still.

The flames roar and hiss continuously.

Hubert lifts her in his arms and walks, or rather staggers, with his burden to the window. He moves like one in a dream. He feels that his brain is whirling round and round.

"Good God!" he shouts, starting back as he gazes out into the garden with horror-stricken eyes. All the people are assembled at the back of the house, watching the window from which he entered, and not ONE is to be seen at the front—to catch the rescued and the rescuer!

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughs derisively. He knows full well that he is losing his reason. "Ha! Ha! Ha! We will die together—and roast—and her husband will wait—and wait—and wait—for her cremated body—and mine. Ha! Ha! Ha! What a joke it will be!" His laugh is the laugh of a maniac. He feels, aye, knows, that he is going mad.

Then he looks at the frail, unconscious form, lying helpless in his arms, and gradually the fierce glare of madness leaves his blood-shot eyes, giving way to one of sorrow and tenderness, as by an almost superhuman effort he forces his brain to guide him.

The flames roar and hiss continuously.

His iron will has conquered his insanity.

"Back! back!" he keeps repeating to himself, as he plunges through the smoke, dodging the fallen timbers and striving to reach the room beyond him.

The little crowd beneath the window have given him up for lost. "He would have appeared at the window before this. He must have been overcome by the heat," passes from mouth to mouth.

A doctor has arrived upon the scene, but it is feared that he will be useless. He cannot raise the *dead*! The Reverend

Hallam Hughes, the vicar of Highthorn, is amongst the eager bystanders, who are almost giving way to despair; but he is keeping up their spirits by suggesting that Dashwood may be searching in the wrong room, and other plausible theories.

L'Estrange is pulling nervously at his moustache, and eagerly watching the roadway down which the fire-engine must come.

Suddenly Hubert appears at the window with his frail burden in his arms. He shouts incoherently to the group of men. They understand, and quickly have a blanket stretched out beneath the casement. Hubert leans forward and drops her gently. She is safe. but consciousness has not yet returned.

Then the men glance upwards at the window again. They see Hubert stagger—his face shows ghastly in the lurid light—he throws up both his arms, as a man will do who is fatally shot, then falls backwards out of sight—back into the burning house.

The flames roar and hiss continuously.

Horses' hoofs are clanging rhythmically, growing louder and louder as they approach. It is the fire engine; the horses, urged onwards, are dashing at galloping pace to the rescue.

Quickly the escape is placed at the window; meanwhile one of the brigade has already ascended the ladder. A few seconds later, Hubert Dashwood's burnt and mutilated body is placed by tender hands—the hands of strong men, gentle as women—upon the mattress laid out upon the blackened lawn.

Sybil has recovered. Only her gold-brown hair is singed. Her body is unhurt. But when they tell her who has rescued her, and that *he* cannot live, and she must not go and see him—will never see him alive to thank him—she wishes that they might have died together, and feels that her heart has broken.

The doctor plies Hubert with brandy, forcing it down the smoke-dried throat. The Reverend Hallam Hughes prays for his eternal salvation—all hope of life has gone. And twenty yards away a graceful woman kneels; the silver moonbeams light up the beautiful upturned face, and seem to cast a halo of glory round the shapely head, as with folded hands she prays as she has never prayed before.

"Let me go to him," she pleads. But her husband stands

betwixt her and the man who has given up his life for hers, even as he has stood between them for the past years.

"You must not see such a sickening sight," he says to her peremptorily. And so she kneels and prays—her husband cannot forbid *that*—a wild and disconnected prayer.

Gradually the patient recovers consciousness. "Is it well? Would it not be better for him to die unconscious? Am I right in bringing him back to pain?" the doctor asks himself.

The flames are becoming less and less. The brigade men are working hard, subduing them with their hose, which throws jet after jet of water over the roof.

The clergyman leans over Hubert and supports his disfigured head, whilst the doctor hastens to prepare an opiate. "You—you are very badly hurt," says the former, as the wounded man opens his eyes for the first time.

He ignores the remark, but, trying to raise himself upon his elbow, says, "She?" questioningly.

"Is safe and unharmed," answers the clergyman. "But you—are you in great pain?"

"Bah!" Hubert makes answer, waving the doctor away. "*She* is unharmed!"

Then a great sigh escapes him, and he sinks back, with a glad smile upon his face, into the clergyman's arms; and the film of death covers over his eyes, and the spirit flies away from its fleshly tenement.

The hissing ceases, the flames are subdued, the last spark of fire has gone out.

* * * *

The daily papers faithfully record Hubert Dashwood's death—the great artist's heroic end—and the enormous loss sustained thereby in artistic circles. And ere many days have passed away another has reached the zenith of the dead man's fame.

* * * *

It is summer. The laburnum tree in the shadiest corner of Highborn churchyard is shedding its petals, which fall like golden tears upon the grassy mound beneath. It is Hubert's last resting-place. In his will he expressed a desire to be buried there, in "God's acre," down the narrow path of which he once had hoped to lead Sybil as his bride.

She is kneeling beside the headstone, thinking of the price which she has had to pay for her mother's brief sojourn abroad. Her blue eyes are dimmed by unshed tears ; her heart feels cold as the marble headstone—yet her thoughts are far away from the earth.

A man is leaning on the little white gate, stamping his feet restlessly. It is Arthur L'Estrange. His voice breaks harshly in upon the solemn silence, which hovers over the hallowed ground, bringing her thoughts suddenly back to the present. "Come, come," he says. "You have been long enough snivelling over the fellow's bones. I am sick of waiting."

Sybil's wan face flushes red, her little lips tremble, as a cutting retort flies to them ; but it is killed in the birth, for they meet the cold stone in one soft, silent kiss.

Then turning round she leaves all hope, all love, all happiness, all save memory behind her, and silently passes through the little white gate, and wanders up the leafy lane with her husband, into the dreary world beyond.

But the laburnum still sheds its golden tears upon Hubert Dashwood's grave.

In Town for a Week.

By C. E. H.

[From the Hon. Laura Tredennis to Lady Bodkin.]

"Hotel Métropole,

"June, 1893.

"DEAREST MOTHER,

"You will want to hear all we have been doing since we left home on Monday. It was fortunate that you telegraphed for rooms, for the hotels were all very full, though we heard yesterday that comparatively few furnished houses are let this season. Perhaps it is because of that that the hotels are so full. What a change all this bustle, commotion and noise is, after our quiet country life. It is very amusing and delightful, but I should soon grow tired of it. We spent yesterday in shopping. You would hardly recognize Jay's Mourning Warehouse, so great are the changes that have been made in it. The rooms all look twice as large, owing to the beautiful scheme of decorations, all carried out in the French style. The whole of the back is in glass, white with leaded tracery, which has a very refined effect. The walls are cream-coloured, a rather warm shade, which gives value to the black, grey, mauve and purple fabrics. Some of the most swagger costumes in London come from Jay's. We saw the Duchess of Sutherland in the Park yesterday, wearing a black chiffon bodice with sleeves all frills, the counterpart of which in heliotrope we had selected at Jay's in the morning. There is a peculiarly soft, rose-like tone of heliotrope, which is correct half-mourning wear, though often called pink, and they make a wonderful use of this in dresses, hats, bonnets and sunshades. We saw there a marvellous garden-party gown, all white silk with a satin-like sheen on it, ruches of rhododendron silk and black lace and chiffon. As they fitted both you and me so admirably with our mourning, I asked if they could possibly make us some coloured gowns when we leave off black, and

I fancy they really will. It is such a good thing to be well-fitted ; I would rather have a well-cut cotton than a badly-hung satin, would not you ?

"It is quite a mistake to suppose that Jay's is a very expensive place to buy materials. We chose a dress length of mauve crêpon and one of pale grey silk muslin, embroidered with small black satin dots, and they were very moderate in price. The Paris gowns are costly, of course, and how very tempting they are. They have an afternoon dress in white English satin, trimmed with real lace in a lovely tone of cream colour, put on as a yoke and arranged as epaulets over the tops of the sleeves, which are made full, with an insertion of lace down the outer side. The belt is in black satin with a gold buckle. The skirt, like all those we saw at Jay's, hung quite soft and full, without any stiffening or other departure from the natural folds of a well-cut gown. The millinery is of the most tempting description ; some of the large picture hats have a grace of curve that would almost make a plain girl look handsome. I chose for you a bonnet that will, I fancy, suit you down to the ground. It is merely a triangle of jet, the front point of which will rest just above the forehead on your pretty white hair, the sides curving off slightly and then descending a little towards the ears. The trimming at the back consists of two small rosettes of white ribbon and a little plume of feathers. My own bonnet is in cream-coloured point lace, stretched on gold wires, edged with jet and trimmed with a garland of heliotrope round the edge in a delightfully becoming way. I noticed the Duchess of Devonshire wearing a bonnet of shaded pansies the other day, and as I saw one very like it at Jay's, I thought I should like to get it for you. What do you think about it ?"

"We then drove to Parkins and Gotto's about the wedding cards and the *menu* stands. Grace advised us to go there because they are sure to know the latest and most correct style of thing. The invitations to the wedding are to be lovely, all pure white with silver lettering. I am sure you will like them. The *menu* stands are really cards of hand-painted porcelain, with a different wild flower painted on each. The drawing and composition of the flowers are both excellent and will please even your fastidious eye. I chose a dressing bag for your present to the bride. All the fittings are in aluminium, which

makes the bag most delightfully light. They have the most tempting assortment of articles for presents that I ever saw in my life. There are mirrors in every kind of pretty shape, with bevelled edges and silver frames. One was heart-shaped, another oval, and a third oblong, and it was really difficult to decide which was the most beautiful. The sets of brushes and other toilet belongings made me want to have a pocket-full of money in order to indulge myself with a few presents made from myself to myself. I should have liked to buy for you a lovely notepaper case in ebony with silver mounts, the top of which draws down to protect the contents from dust. You would have fallen in love with the pretty little scrolls for *menus* that are so novel and taking, tied up with bows of coloured ribbon. The latest idea in programmes is to have the ribbon across them, instead of down. The newest colour for notepaper is pale mauve, called 'Royal.'

"We sauntered up to Peter Robinson's after completing our purchases, and found that the number of smart coats and gowns was so great and the variety so infinite that it was extremely difficult to choose, as you would have known could you have seen the beautiful things they have there in such quantities, and all in the very latest and most 'swagger' fashion. For the last year or two 'Peter's,' as it is familiarly termed, has gone in for the very best class of gowns, &c., and the consequence is that many of the very smartest women in London go there for clothes. So we were told by a friend of Eva's, who knows all the ropes in such matters. It was surprising to me to find trimmings, buttons, boas, fans, lace, flowers, ribbons, combs and other ornaments so inexpensive in this large house, which always has a dense crowd round its windows, so well are they arranged. One is devoted to materials of every kind, and with your experience of country-town window-dressing and country-town prices, you would be astonished indeed could you see this one. Silks at one shilling and sixpence the yard, dress lengths at eight shillings and sixpence, satins at three shillings and sixpence, and fancy materials for about half what we are asked for them down at home, are difficult things to tear oneself away from. Eva told me that last year she bought herself a cornflower cotton gown at Peter's, embroidered in a paler shade, made it up herself, and the cost of the whole thing was less than a sovereign. It turned out a most

successful dress, but then, you know, Eva has learned the scientific dress-cutting system, the real original one.

"Eva next took me to Garrould's, in the Edgware Road, where they sell those pretty housekeeping aprons which we have so often seen illustrated and recommended in the ladies' papers. Here, too, we saw endless materials for dresses, which struck us as being most remarkably cheap. French muslins printed in pretty designs, foulards and surahs, all of the latest *mode*, zephyrs in the daintiest of patterns and coolest and freshest of tints, all promised us good value for our money, and the promise was not unfulfilled. We bought some very pretty blouses and a jersey or two, as I remembered that you wanted a braided blue one and a black one to wear with your serge skirt.

"I wish we had Harrod's stores down somewhere near us. So would you if you had been all through them, as I have this morning. There is everything you can think of to be had there, groceries, cheese, bacon, eggs, drugs, vegetables, fruit, brushes, oil, and now they have just opened a linen drapery department. The prices are all on the Stores level, and Eva told me that her mother had saved something very considerable in housekeeping since she began to go there for everything. 'And then the things are so good,' added Eva. 'We get much better ideas from their price list than we used from merely prowling about among the various shops, and they have such excellent tinned things. Those were Harrod's curried prawns that we had at breakfast this morning.' I am sending you a price list, dear mother, in order that you may send for a lot of very tempting things by the time I get back again.

"We called at Sampson's, 268, Oxford Street, about the new ties for Edward, and took a lesson in tying them, which I will endeavour to pass on to him when I get back. You have no idea of what charming things they have for river wear for men; varieties without end: Kummerbunds in Indian silk and Bengal green, and ties to match. I chose a Turkish bath-towel dressing gown for Edward, as being the coolest thing of the kind for this hot weather; and the surplice shirts which he likes so much are to be finished and sent home to him next week.

"At Harvey, Nicholls and Co.'s, Hyde Park Gate, there is a sale on, and we spent a couple of hours there and a great deal of money, so tempting were the bargains. It is a delightful shop,

because the things sold are good and in the latest fashion, as well as inexpensive. I got there the pink silk muslin that we want for reorganizing my white satin dinner gown and the jet trimming for your ruby velvet. They seem to have everything there that one can possibly want in the dress department.

"It seems absurd to think of waterproofs while the weather continues so fine, but it is good, as the proverb says, to provide against a rainy day. We heard from Ida that the Cravenettes were so excellent, being very light of weight and fashionably cut—both great desiderata in a waterproof. We were both measured for one, and I fully expect mine to be the comfort of my life in the autumn and winter. They have not the slightest macintoshy smell and are also free from the rattling stiffness that too often characterizes the waterproof. In fact, the Cravenette looks like a well-cut, well-hung and well-fitting mantle.

"Hearing that Walpole Brothers, of 89, New Bond Street, had supplied a wonderful table-cloth to the Duke of York's new *ménage*, we went in, hoping that we might see it, but it had been sent home. However, we improved the occasion by inspecting their beautiful stock of Irish hand-loom table damask, and ordering a few that I am sure you will admire, for Edward's new home. The designs are lovely.

"We turned into Boyd's, a few doors further down the street, and looked at their new safety spirit lamp, which they have patented. It is so constructed that there is no danger of over-filling it, a common source of accident, and a shield is arranged round the burner to prevent the reservoir containing the spirit from becoming hot. The patent lamp can be fitted to old lamps at a small charge. We must have one for the river. I am sending you an illustration of it, and feel certain you will order one, as you are always so nervous about our tea-making on board the boat.

"I have not forgotten about your wools. We went the very first day we were in town to Hogg's, in Goodge Street, and got your Shetland wool, 'Lady Betty,' Scotch fingering and some of the Pine wool that is so good for rheumatic people to wear. They have every kind, every colour and every shade that was ever invented, I do believe.

"Corsets are a great subject, are they not? Have you ever

heard of the 'Astoria' variety? They are the invention of Mr. John Lang, of Beak Street, Regent Street, who has studied anatomy and also the great problem of obesity and its repression. The novelty in these corsets lies in the fact that all the seams and selvedges run horizontally instead of perpendicularly, the result being that the corset retains its shape for a very much longer time than it could otherwise do. It throws the chest well forward, an important particular in the carriage, which is too much neglected by both slight and stout persons, and one on which the health depends as much as symmetry and grace. The 'Astoria' makes the best of the figure, in fact, and I fully expect to look charming when I return to you. You will scarcely know

"Your affectionate daughter,

"LAURA TREDENNIS."

The Garden Gate.

WHERE the half-open garden-gate
Permits a vision to be seen
Of tulips in imperial state
And yellow crocuses serene,
I see, beneath the budding trees,
Kissed softly by the vernal breeze,
A maiden, pure as primroses,
Of seventeen.

Halfway across the lawn she stands,
Not coming forth nor going in,
Spring blossoms in her dainty hands,
And in her breast no harboured sin.
A vague and tender fancy gleams
In mystic hues across her dreams ;
Her candid mind is what it seems,
To joy akin.

'Twixt blushing dawn and gracious noon
She pauses in her shy retreat ;
Fair is her path, but all too soon
The woman and the girl must meet.
Ah, it were well to steal away
While lilacs bloom and reddest may,
And in the fragrant woods all day
Lie at her feet !

O that I might encompass her
With honour, like a coming queen,
And be myself the harbinger
Of joys as yet unknown, unseen !
And while the sun looked down to see,
Fain would I carol in my glee—
Sweet age ! The sweetest age to me—
Sweet seventeen !

FAYR MADOC.

"The House that Jack Built."

By DARLEY DALE,

Author of "FAIR KATHERINE," "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONTAINS SOME JERSEY GOSSIP.

"AMY, I have heard from Mr. Selsey; he wants me to take back my old servant, Green, who married the gardener's daughter at Oxburgh," said Jack Lockwood to his wife, about a week after Mr. Hyde's party.

It was the first time he had spoken to her except before the servants or in society since, and Amy hoped he had forgiven her, so, anxious to conciliate him she made no objection to the proposal, although it came from her bugbear, Mr. Selsey.

"By all means if you wish it," she answered.

"I can't say I wish it, but Selsey does; he has cured the fellow, he thinks, and he wants me to take him back for three months on trial; he will come at once," said Mr. Lockwood, speaking in a very distant tone.

"I wonder how long he is going to keep up this distant manner," thought Amy, as having made the above communication, her husband went out and left her to her own devices for the afternoon.

"He could hardly be more angry if he knew of my debts. I wish I had told him when we were in that cave. I shall never have such a golden opportunity again, and really they are worrying me to a packthread. I don't know what to do; I can't borrow of Aunt Sophy again, and I know no one else to apply to except Felix when he is here at Christmas, if I can pull on till then; but even then Felix can't lend me more than a few pounds, I know, so it is only staving off the evil day. I wish one of my dear aunts would die and leave me some money; their money must come to me some day, unless they marry, and there is not much danger of that. By the way, I wonder if the Rev. Josiah

Dobson has got that letter yet ; he ought to have had it by now. That was a noble thought of mine sending it to Africa. How mad Aunt Dorcas will be when he writes and says anxiety for the souls of the negroes prevents him from coming to take her out to Africa."

Amy had just reached this point in her meditations when, to her great annoyance, Mr. Stanley Hyde, who she had reason to suspect bribed the servant to admit him, was announced. As she expected, he was full of regret at her sudden departure from his party before the dancing began, and was not at all inclined to believe her health necessitated it.

"The only compensation you can make, Mrs. Lockwood, is to come for a drive with me. It is a lovely day ; why not come now ? I'll drive you anywhere you like to name," said Mr. Hyde, drawing his chair close to the sofa Amy was sitting on and gazing rudely into her beautiful face in a manner he thought fascinating, and she considered insulting.

"Thank you, that is quite impossible ; I have to meet my husband at a friend's house in half-an-hour," said Amy, inventing an engagement and giving her visitor a broad hint to depart at the same stroke.

He declined to take the hint, and at last in desperation Amy promised to go for a drive with him that day week, trusting to Providence to interpose some obstacle before the day arrived ; for no power on earth would have induced her to go for a drive alone with Mr. Hyde. Of the two evils, she would prefer that he should tell her husband of her debts.

The week slipped by, and on the morning of the day the drive was to come off, nothing had occurred to serve as even a plausible excuse for giving it up. The weather was against her, for the day was one of those lovely balmy days one gets in Jersey in late autumn, days which cheat us into believing it is still summer.

Jack was still on stilts ; he had not forgiven her for her disobedience, and Amy now felt sure he did not intend to do so until she expressed some contrition.

All the morning she racked her brains to think of some way of avoiding this *tête-à-tête* drive with Mr. Hyde, but the only possible way that occurred to her was to get Jack to prevent it.

To feign illness, to get up another engagement, to forget it and

go out before the time, would only enrage Mr. Hyde, who in revenge would betray her secret. The only feasible scheme was to induce her husband to decline to allow her to go. She must get him to return just as she would be starting and refuse to let her go.

This would not be difficult if she were on terms with Jack, for he certainly would not let her drive with Mr. Hyde, if he knew she was going to do so. At last she arrived at the conclusion that she must make peace with her husband before the time fixed for the drive.

Jack always lunched at home now, chiefly on Gladys' account, for she and the baby were always brought to their mother immediately after luncheon, while the nurse dined. It was the half-hour in the day Jack most loved and Amy most hated; while it lasted he forgot all his cares and troubles in watching his little daughter's efforts at walking alone, and in rousing her laugh as he carried her about the room, now pick-a-back, now on his shoulders, now on all fours; there was no folly this Jack was not guilty of with his baby. This entertainment generally lasted till about half-past two, when Mr. Lockwood either rode or walked till four, when he went to the club, unless there was any large party he was obliged to go to.

Mr. Hyde was to call for Amy at three, and when the children were brought down she was still in Jack's black books. If anything, he seemed more distant than ever this afternoon, and when she made some remarks about Green, who had arrived, he answered her very shortly.

"I have only three-quarters of an hour before he comes. I must do it," said Amy, as she sat with her baby-boy lying crowing on her lap, while Jack was carrying Gladys on his shoulder to London, Paris, Guernsey, and various other distant places.

They were on their way to Paris, when it pleased little Gladys to wish to stop to say good-bye to her mother; at least this was the interpretation her proud father put upon her baby language.

"She wishes to say good-bye to you, Amy; we are off to Paris," said Jack, stooping so that Amy could kiss the child.

"Good-bye, Gladys; come back soon," said Amy, but Gladys was not satisfied; she wanted something more, something which her father understood perfectly, though it did not suit him to comply with her request.

Miss Gladys, however, had a will of her own, and finding herself for the first time in her life thwarted by her father, burst into tears, not loud, passionate cries, but a pathetic weeping Jack could not resist.

He took the sobbing child off his shoulder, and soothed its cries, and then he bent over Amy and said coldly :

"She wants you to say good-bye to me as well, Amy," and his lips touched his wife's forehead.

Now was Amy's opportunity, and lifting her head up till her lips were on a level with his as he bent over her, she whispered :

"Forgive me, Jack."

Jack was propitiated at once ; he kissed her, and kneeling down by her side, clasped her and the children in his arms, and peace was restored.

The worse half of Amy's task was accomplished now ; she had only to tell her husband of the projected drive and he would stop it whether Mr. Hyde were offended or not.

"What are you going to do, Jack, this afternoon ?" she asked when the children were taken away.

"Nothing particular. I'll go for a drive with you if you like."

"I wish you would. Mr. Stanley Hyde is going to call for me at three, and I don't want to go with him. He is a perfect nuisance, but I think Green does understand that he is not to be admitted, though I could never make Smith say 'not at home' to him."

"All right, I'll be here at three, and I'll tell Green we shall want the pony at a quarter-past."

At three o'clock punctually Mr. Stanley Hyde was shown into the drawing-room, where to his surprise and annoyance Mr. Lockwood was sitting with his wife, who, however, had on her hat and jacket as if going out.

Mr. Hyde inwardly decided to take it for granted that Amy was going with him, so after a few commonplaces he remarked as he rose :

"Now, Mrs. Lockwood, the days are so short ; if you are quite ready we may as well start."

Amy looked at her husband.

"Mrs. Lockwood is going to drive with me this afternoon," remarked Jack.

"Oh ! Mrs. Lockwood, this is really too bad of you ; you

promised me a week ago to come to-day," said Mr. Hyde, looking very much annoyed.

"I am so sorry, but Mr. Lockwood does not care for me to drive except with him. This is such a wretched little island for gossip, one cannot be too careful," said Amy in her sweetest tones.

"I should be equally careful on that point in England, or indeed anywhere," said Jack, in a very uncompromising tone.

"In that case, I can only wish you good-bye; but I must say I think you have treated me very shabbily," said Mr. Hyde, who, calm outwardly, was inwardly vowing vengeance on Jack for thus baulking him of his afternoon's pleasure.

He was not a man to offend lightly; though few people cared to covet him a friend, still fewer would choose him as a foe. His was a cruel nature, which would stop at nothing to gratify his desire for revenge. As he drove away from the Lockwoods' that November afternoon, frowning and gnawing his under-lip in suppressed anger, there was an expression in his eyes which boded no good to Jack or Amy.

"I'll be even with them yet," he muttered with an evil smile, more dangerous than a frown.

But while he was meditating vengeance, his victims were nearer to happiness than they had yet been, though Amy's peace was clouded by the shadow of her debts. A change was coming over Amy; it seemed as if she were about to develop into a jealous wife now she was in love with her husband. She had grown to care whether he smiled or frowned upon her; she would have been furiously jealous had he flirted with any one else; she would have given a great deal to know for a fact that he had forgotten Joy. She wished he and Joy could meet in her presence, that she might satisfy herself Joy was no longer anything to him.

How she wished Joy would marry! Why didn't the silly little thing take Major Graham? The poor man was desperately in love with her, and she would make an excellent step-mother to his children. Perhaps she would take him. Major Graham was then in England; perhaps he would come back engaged to Joy.

"If he does I shall get Felix to have us asked to Roxburgh for our leave in January," thought Mrs. Lockwood one day when Jack mentioned that he had heard from Graham.

"By-the-way, Amy, I thought that missionary your aunts know was in Africa," said Jack on the day Mr. Dobson reached Jersey.

"So he is, or so he was—why?" said Amy, her thoughts flying to the letter she had written to that gentleman in Miss Dorcas's name.

"Because I met him driving away from the pier as I came home from the Fort; he was evidently going out to Saumarez."

"Nonsense! you don't mean it, Jack," exclaimed Amy, her colour rising with delight mingled with fear at the success of her trick.

"Yes, I do; I didn't think it would interest you so much, though," replied Lockwood.

"Oh, but it does; he was in Africa, so he must have come on Aunt Dorcas's account, I suppose. That is why I am interested," said Amy, who dared not tell Jack of the trick she had played on the missionary.

She longed to know if it were her letter which had brought him so far; still more did she long to know what Miss Dorcas would say and do if it were; and she would have given her quarter's allowance, badly as she needed it, to witness the scene recorded in the last chapter.

She dared not drive out to Saumarez to see what was going on, lest they should suspect she had had a finger in the pie they were baking; but the next day she sent Green over with a note to ask Miss Keppel to come and spend the afternoon with her.

Green brought back a verbal message that Miss Keppel would come if possible, and would Mrs. Lockwood excuse a letter? He supplemented this message by expressing his opinion that there was something amiss in the house.

"What makes you think so, Green?" said Amy, her curiosity intensely excited.

"Well, ma'am, the servants rushed to the door when I rang, and seemed disappointed to see me, and I heard a crying as if somebody was in hysterics, and I heard Miss Keppel say she could not write to you, her head felt as if it would burst with so much worry, so I put two and two together."

"Did you see Miss Dorcas, the tall one with short hair? She is always in the garden in the morning," said Amy.

"No, ma'am ; I saw no one but two scared servants and some dogs, and the dogs were howling like mad, and that is a bad sign," said Green.

Mrs. Lockwood's curiosity was highly excited by this report ; what could have happened ? Green was right ; there was evidently something amiss ; it was an unheard of thing not to find Miss Dorcas in the garden at that hour of the morning.

Mrs. Lockwood racked her brains to guess what had occurred, but that which really had happened never entered her head. All that afternoon she stayed in the house in the hope of Miss Keppel calling, but that lady did not appear ; and she had to wait till Jack came home from the club before her curiosity was gratified.

"If anything has happened, they are sure to hear it at the club," thought Amy.

This was true, for men are really much greater gossips than women ; and the moment Jack came in Amy saw by his face he had something to tell her.

"Is there any news at the club ?"

"Yes, some that will both surprise and interest you. Your aunt Dorcas has eloped !"

"What ! Aunt Dorcas ! You must be mad, Jack !"

"No, I am not mad ; she is, perhaps ; but it is quite true. Graham is my authority ; he saw them at Guernsey this morning ; he was coming back and the two boats met, and he saw Mr. Dobson and Miss Dorcas go ashore."

"I can't believe it yet ; surely Major Graham made a mistake."

"Oh, no, he didn't ; it was known at the club that Dobson arrived yesterday, and that Miss Dorcas has been missing all to-day ; besides, we have had confirmation of it, which will appear in the paper to-night."

"Confirmation of what ?" said Amy.

"Of the marriage !"

"The marriage ! Do you mean to say they are married ?" exclaimed Amy, looking rather crestfallen, for she by no means wished any of her aunts to marry and leave their money away from her.

"Yes, they were married in Guernsey as soon as they arrived."

"How do you know ?"

"We sent a confidential messenger to the paper office to ask

if any marriage notice had been telegraphed from Guernsey, and the reply was a copy of the advertisement which will appear this evening of the marriage of the Rev. Josiah Dobson and Miss Dorcas Keppel."

"How like you men! The idea of your sending to the newspaper office! And then you say we women are gossips! What do you call that, I should like to know?" said Amy.

"Intelligent inquiry," replied Jack.

"Well, I am amazed. Aunt Dorcas married, and a runaway marriage, too, at her time of life; the old sinner," said Amy.

"I expect she did that to avoid the fuss of a wedding. I suppose she made up her mind at last to marry the man, and thought if 'twere done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well 'twere done quickly. I expect you'll have your aunt Sophy here full of it to-morrow," said Jack.

"I shan't wait for that; I shall drive over to Saumarez to see her the first thing after breakfast."

All that evening Jack Lockwood was very thoughtful and grave; he did not read, nor was he inclined to talk, but he sat staring at the fire the greater part of the evening; and Amy, who had acquired the art of reading his thoughts to a certain extent, knew he was thinking of Joy.

"He always has that melancholy look when he is thinking of her, the horrid creature," thought his wife.

"Amy, I told you Graham is back, didn't I?" said Jack, at last rousing himself from his reverie.

"Yes, to be sure you did," replied Amy.

"He is very happy; he is engaged to your cousin, Joy Oxburgh," said Jack, and in spite of himself his voice trembled as he said Joy's name.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW MISS KEPPEL AND MISS LYDIA BORE THE NEWS.

It was all quite true.

Miss Dorcas had eloped with her missionary, and was married in Guernsey by special licence, as Mr. Lockwood had learnt at his club.

Soon after Miss Dorcas had given herself and her liberty to Mr. Dobson, she desried the puppy, which she had forgotten,

lying under the sofa, busily and happily occupied in unravelling a bundle of Miss Lydia's embroidery silks, which she used for her church work.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear, Lion! Now there will be another row. Lock the door till I have caught him, Josiah. If Lydia comes in, she'll want me to whip the dog again," exclaimed Miss Dorcas, as, after an exciting chase, she caught the dog and rescued the silks, which were spoilt.

"They are utterly spoilt. I must go to town and buy some more," said Miss Dorcas.

"I'll walk with you. Shall we tell Miss Keppel of our happiness first, Dorcas?"

"Oh, no; I can never tell Sophia. I shall never face her or any one. I wish we could go to church one day and be married, and say nothing to any one until it was done," said Miss Dorcas.

"Well, why should not we do so? No one knows I am here. I walked in and I will walk out again and meet you in the lane, and we will make our plans as we walk into town," said Mr. Dobson.

Miss Dorcas agreed to this out of sheer shyness, and during the walk she was persuaded to go to Guernsey and be married the next morning, for, as Mr. Dobson urged with truth, he had waited long enough for his bride; there was no need to add a lengthy engagement to the time he had already served for his Rachel.

It was not surprising under the circumstances that Miss Dorcas should have forgotten all about Miss Lydia's silks; but, as luck would have it, that little lady was too much absorbed in her novel all the evening to find out the puppy's last delinquency. Indeed, she only looked up from her book two or three times to remonstrate with her sister Dorcas for fidgeting.

"Lydia is right, Dorcas; you have not been quiet for five consecutive minutes the whole evening," said Miss Keppel, looking up from her book of travels.

Miss Keppel posed as a superior woman. Therefore she did not read novels, but affected books of travel, history and biography, occasionally falling asleep over them in the long winter evenings.

They were very different, these three maiden ladies, different in every way; and as they sat together for the last time, any

stranger peeping in at them would scarcely have taken them for sisters.

Miss Keppel, in her dinner dress of rich black velvet, her white hair looking still whiter by contrast with the long black lace veil she always wore, and which set off to the best advantage her handsome features and well-preserved complexion, had a matronly appearance, and no one would have taken her for an old maid.

Miss Dorcas, in her plain black silk dress, donned every evening by Miss Keppel's orders, with her short grisly hair, her homely features, her masculine air and her abrupt manners, was the very antipodes of Miss Keppel.

Miss Lydia, again, was unlike either of her sisters ; very small, very fair, very young in dress and manner ; she affected coloured ribbons and dresses open at the neck and with short sleeves, in the evening ; she still blushed and giggled on any and every occasion, and having been a coquette in her youth, was *dévôté* in her maturity.

These ladies, when at home, always spent their evenings in the same way. After dinner, which was finished by half-past eight, Miss Keppel nodded over her history, Miss Dorcas read the newspaper and Miss Lydia a novel till a quarter to ten, when the servants came in to prayers ; after which Miss Dorcas pecked at her sisters' cheeks and went up to bed, having first gone the round of the house to see that the doors and windows were all bolted and barred ; and Miss Keppel and Miss Lydia sat up and played backgammon for an hour.

This evening Miss Dorcas did not seem in her usual hurry to go to bed ; she dawdled about, and when at length she said good-night, she gave each of her sisters an extra kiss, and if such a thing had been at all likely, Miss Keppel would have declared there were tears in her eyes as she left the room.

The boat leaves Jersey at a quarter to seven every morning, and it was nearly three-quarters of an hour's drive to the pier ; so at six the next morning Miss Dorcas crept downstairs in the grey dawn, and, letting herself out of the house as quietly as possible, walked down the drive with a small portmanteau in her hand. At the gate stood a fly, out of which Mr. Dobson sprang to welcome her and help her in, and the next minute they were on their way to the pier.

She was not missed until breakfast time, and then Miss Keppel only thought she was in the garden. However, when Miss Lydia returned from "matins," and Miss Dorcas still did not appear, a servant was sent to look for her.

"Miss Dorcas is gone out, ma'am. Her hat and jacket are not in her room, and cook says she thinks she went out very early, for the hall door was undone when she came down at half-past six this morning," said the maid.

Miss Keppel was surprised, but not alarmed. She did not believe the cook was down before half-past seven; and if any of the animals were ailing, it was quite possible Miss Dorcas had gone to the veterinary's about it.

However, after breakfast, Miss Dorcas not returning, she sent for the gardener to make inquiries. He had not seen Miss Dorcas, and as he reported that the animals were all well, Miss Keppel now began to feel alarmed.

She went upstairs to search her sister's room, and had just discovered that Miss Dorcas had taken a portmanteau and a change of dress with her, when a hue and cry from Miss Lydia and a howl from the puppy called her downstairs.

"Oh, Sophy, where is Dorcas? This wretched puppy has spoilt my embroidery silks. It is too bad. I have whipped the brute, but I can't hurt it. Where *is* Dorcas?" and Miss Lydia looked inclined to cry.

"Lydia, Dorcas is gone," said Miss Keppel solemnly. She looked very pale and very grave as she spoke.

"Gone!" exclaimed Miss Lydia.

"Yes, eloped," said Miss Keppel.

At this dreadful word Miss Lydia gave a little shriek of horror.

"Eloped! Where to?" she cried.

"I don't know. I am afraid something very serious has happened," said Miss Keppel; whereupon Miss Lydia, by way of doing something helpful, went into violent hysterics.

She laughed and cried, and sighed and sobbed, and gave Miss Keppel something to do in attending to her, which was perhaps a good thing, for the poor lady was at her wits' ends to know what to do about Miss Dorcas.

It was a delicate matter to make inquiries about, she thought, and if only Lydia had shown more self-control she would have pretended to the servants that she knew what had become of her sister.

About ten o'clock, however, her suspense and anxiety were changed into certain knowledge by the arrival of a telegram from Guernsey, signed "Dorcas Dobson;" it was as follows:

"We were married this morning here. It will be in this evening's paper. We leave for England at the end of the week. We will write to-day."

A bomb-shell thrown into Saumarez Cottage could not have caused more consternation than did this message.

Miss Keppel was as shocked as she was surprised to think one of her "girls" had actually eloped! Why, the fastest of Jersey girls could hardly have done worse! What a scandal it would create!

If it had been Lydia, she would still have been shocked; but Lydia was always flighty, so she would not have been so much surprised.

But that Dorcas, the sober Dorcas, the man-hater, the staid, the proper, the sensible Dorcas, her favourite sister, that she should have dealt her such a blow; this was too much for Miss Keppel, and, shutting herself in the library, she gave way to a fit of tears, and left the wondering maids to recover Miss Lydia from the second attack of hysterics into which the telegram threw her.

It was about this time that Green arrived, but Miss Keppel felt she could see no one that day, hence her message to Mrs. Lockwood. That evening the whole island would know of the scandal Dorcas had created; and as she guessed, Mrs. Lockwood would come down the next day to hear particulars.

Miss Keppel spent the whole of the day in solemn seclusion, occupying most of her time in writing to Mrs. Dobson. Miss Lydia having been in hysterics in the morning, went to confession to the rector in the afternoon, a proceeding which for once roused Miss Keppel's indignation.

"What nonsense, Lydia. What had you to confess, I should like to know? It is not your fault that Dorcas has eloped."

"I may have sinned in thought, if not in deed, as much as Dorcas, Sophia," remonstrated Miss Lydia humbly.

"The wish was father to the thought, no doubt," said Miss Keppel, which was severe of her, but, poor thing, she was very much troubled and annoyed.

"I did not want it known at the Rectory until this evening, when they will see it in the paper," she continued.

"No one will know it, Sophy dear ; it was told under the seal of confession," said Miss Lydia cheerfully.

"Be quiet, Lydia, do. I am too angry to listen to such absurdities with equanimity to-day. And for the future I must beg you not to leave the house again without my permission."

This prohibition, far from annoying Miss Lydia, rather pleased her ; it made her feel quite young again, and she half made up her mind to order a white dress for evening wear on the strength of it.

Dorcas had eloped. Why should not she, who was several years younger, do the same ?

Sophy was quite wise to be careful, and when Amy called the next day Miss Lydia was not at all offended at receiving a hint to leave her married niece alone with Miss Keppel.

Mrs. Lockwood was by no means pleased at the success of the trick she had played on her aunt Dorcas ; the biter was bit, for it was to her advantage that her aunts should remain single and go over to the majority as quickly as possible, leaving her their money.

Now not a penny of Miss Dorcas's money would she ever get. She would leave it to her husband if he survived her and to some of his poor relations if he did not.

Besides this the scandal Miss Dorcas's elopement would cause was a serious annoyance to Mrs. Lockwood ; she set up for being such a pattern wife, and was so careful to avoid giving scandal herself, that for one of her aunts to be the talk of the island for nine days was very annoying to her.

"How horrid of Aunt Dorcas, Aunt Sophy. Why, the man was in Africa : she must have been meditating this for a long time, for he would never have come so far unless she had told him she would marry him," said Mrs. Lockwood.

"I know no particulars till the mail comes in ; it is so provokingly late to-day."

"It always is when one particularly wants one's letters," said Amy, thinking she had better leave before the post arrived, lest, if Mrs. Dobson mentioned the forged letter, her aunt Sophy should suspect her of being the author of it.

In spite of her annoyance she was proud of the success of her joke and longed to share it with some one ; if only Jack Jimpson had been in Jersey how he would have enjoyed it.

"I really must tell Jack," thought Amy, meaning her husband, as she drove home, and so she did one evening a few days later after dinner.

"Do you remember my telling you I would pay Aunt Dorcas out for letting me in for that prayer meeting, Jack?" she asked as Jack picked some walnuts for her.

"Yes, quite well."

"I have had my revenge, and a very kind revenge it was, too; Aunt Dorcas may thank me she is married."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I wrote to Mr. Dobson in Aunt Dorcas's name and writing and said if he would come for her she would marry him; he took the bait, came, and I suppose forced her to keep the promise she never made."

"You did, Amy? Well, certainly that is one of the best jokes I ever heard. I should not be surprised to hear Miss Dorcas guessed who the culprit was and married to spite you; she is quite capable of it," said Jack.

"Quite; I daresay she did so," said Amy.

"How did you manage to imitate her writing so well?" asked Jack.

"Oh, easily enough. I can imitate any writing perfectly; it is one of my many accomplishments," said Amy lightly, as her husband crossed the room with a plate of walnuts for her.

He was always very attentive in all such little matters; but since they had heard of Joy's engagement his manner to his wife had been tenderer than before; before it had been perfectly courteous, often kind, sometimes almost affectionate, but the last few days it had been more: there was a deprecating attitude about him which seemed to say he was conscious of past coldness, and wished in a measure to atone for it.

This at least was the interpretation Amy put on his manner, and it was correct; she had watched him narrowly since he had told her of Joy's engagement, and she was convinced it was a relief to him, and so perhaps it was, for it made the assurance that Joy could never be his doubly sure.

A slight frown crossed his handsome features as Amy made the above remark, and he answered gravely:

"It is not an accomplishment I should cultivate if I were you."

"Don't look so solemn about it ; I am not going to be guilty of forgery," laughed Amy.

"God forbid !" exclaimed Jack.

"Unlikely things do happen, don't they ? Just fancy that prim old Aunt Dorcas actually eloping. I wish we could go away till the nine days' wonder it will create has subsided," said Amy.

"I can't go till January ; my leave begins in the second week. Have you thought where we are to go besides to your people and mine ?"

"I should like to go to Oxburgh for a fortnight ; I have not been since we married. What do you say ?" asked Amy, who was not a little anxious as to Jack's answer.

"I have no objection," said Jack gravely.

"Then he has got over his fancy for Joy. I must get Felix to have us invited ; I really wish to go," thought Amy, and there the matter for the present ended.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE GOLDEN LIGHT.

"WHAT is Major Graham doing up at the Hall again this year, Perriam ?" inquired the gardener's wife one October evening.

"I can't say, wife," said Perriam, who was reading.

"Of course you can't say. You never can say anything I want to hear."

"I can't say because I don't know."

"Don't know, indeed ! A likely tale that is. You have no opportunity for knowing, have you ? You aren't about the gardens and houses all day ; you never see what goes on up there, do you ? You never hear the servants talking ! Servants never do talk about their master's affairs, do they ? I might have known you could not know anything about the major, nor about Miss Joy neither, I suppose," said Mrs. Perriam with fine sarcasm.

"I know he follows her about everywhere," said Perriam.

"Oh, come ! You do know something after all, then ; maybe if I wait patiently I may hear a little more."

"If you wait patiently you may hear a great deal," said Perriam with a smile.

"Which, I suppose, means you think I can't wait patiently."

Oh ! Perriam, I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself. But men never are ashamed : we would never have had clothes to wear if it had not been for Eve ; it was she thought of those aprons, I'll be bound. I didn't wait patiently on you when you were ill, I suppose ? I have not waited patiently this two years come January to know where Rose is ? Nobody never did wait patiently—not even David, though he says so in his psalms—if I have not, and then to fling it in my face : if I wait patiently ! ”

“ If you do, you may hear what Major Graham got by waiting patiently,” said Perriam.

“ I thought you did not know what he was doing. Seems to me you know a good deal ; but you always were so close, Perriam. You were born close, and close you'll be to the end of the chapter, I suppose, so it is no use talking about it,” said Mrs. Perriam.

Nevertheless, although she arrived at this philosophical conclusion, she continued to talk about it for the remainder of the evening.

Major Graham had been at Oxburgh a week when this conversation took place, and although up to that point he had not formally renewed his proposal to Joy, both the squire and Mrs. Oxburgh, who were eager for the match, gave him great hope that this time he would meet with a favourable answer.

One evening, the sportsmen being late in returning from pheasant shooting and Mrs. Oxburgh being anxious, as she always was when there was a shooting party, till they returned, Joy took The Captain and walked down to the far lodge to see if she could meet them.

It had been a lovely October day, and the sunset, Joy thought, was going to be as an October sunset often is, a grand one. Already the western sky was glowing with golden tints, against which background rich purple clouds of fantastic shapes stood out in bold relief. The sinking sun shed a golden light on the world it was leaving ; the parkland gleamed golden beneath its slanting rays, the elms already crowned with gold caught the golden light, the waters of the lake reflected it, all nature seemed bathed in this rich, soft, warm tint, and as nature's moods are very infectious, Joy, who was susceptible to all such influences, caught the tone and felt her heart glow, and her soul too seemed flooded in golden light.

At the far lodge she met the shooting party, and while the squire and a friend hurried on to relieve Mrs. Oxburgh's anxiety, Joy followed more slowly with Major Graham.

They talked first of the day's sport, and then of the sunset, which seemed to depress Major Graham, for he sighed as he gazed at the golden sky now flecked with rosy clouds.

"Isn't it beautiful?" said Joy.

"Very, almost too beautiful," he answered.

"Does it make you sad?" said Joy, but without waiting for an answer she went on: "Beauty never makes me sad; I could shout for joy when I see a beautiful view or building or sunset, and yet I have heard of people who burst into tears at the sight of the Duomo at Florence or the Coliseum."

"They may be tears of joy, though I confess I feel sad when I see a fine sunset or a grand view; with me it is a selfish sadness: I think it is a craving for sympathy; I long for some one to share the pleasure it gives me with me."

"Well, I am sharing the sunset with you, so you ought not to feel sad this evening," said Joy.

It was not a wise speech, since she did not wish him to take advantage of it, and she thought so a moment later.

"I should never feel sad again if I had you always with me to share my joys and sorrows. Joy, I want you so very much; let me speak once more; will you come to me? I will wait if you will only promise to be my wife some day. Will you, Joy?"

He had given his gun to his servant when they met, so he had nothing in his hands but Joy's dog-whip, and as he spoke he caught hold of one of Joy's hands, and felt it tremble as it lay unresisting in his.

"Major Graham, do you know about me and—and Jack?" asked Joy shyly, turning crimson.

"I know there was something between you, but I don't know what."

"We loved each other, and Amy came between us and deceived him; and I can never love any one else in that way," said Joy.

"Love me in another way, then; I will be satisfied. Joy, if you only loved me as you love that dog, I should be the happiest man on earth."

They were standing still now in the golden light; he had

seized both her hands, and was looking down at her, so eagerly that Joy's eyes fell, and he went on :

"Joy, we do not love twice in the same way. I have, as you know, loved before, but my love for you is none the less for that."

"I don't know what to say," said Joy, feeling she must say something.

"Say, yes," whispered the major.

"I am very young, and I suppose I shall forget the past ; if he were dead I—I think I should say yes," said Joy, speaking slowly, and more as if she were thinking aloud than speaking to him.

"He is dead to you," said Major Graham gently, but there was a note of rebuke in his voice which Joy was quick to perceive.

To his surprise and distress she burst into tears, and the sobs came fast and deep.

"What have I said ? brute that I am. Joy, my darling, for God's sake, don't cry so. What is it, my love ? Don't, Joy, don't," and before Joy realized what was happening, she was in his arms, sobbing on his breast, as he kissed the tears from her face.

Presently she made an effort to get away, but he held her tighter.

"Not yet, Joy. Promise me first you will marry me some day. I will not hurry you ; I will wait till you have quite forgotten," he whispered.

"Then I will try to forget," answered Joy.

"And some day, a long time off, perhaps, you will be my wife ?" he pleaded.

"Yes," said Joy, and after that, till they got home just in time to dress for dinner. the conversation was not worth recording.

There were traces of tears on Joy's fresh young face when she appeared at dinner, and the squire noticing it and wondering at the cause said :

"Joy, you look like a rose which has been washed in a shower."

"I have just gathered the rose, Mr. Oxburgh, and it has not a thorn," said Major Graham, leading Joy proudly to the squire ; and after this there were great rejoicings that evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Oxburgh were delighted ; they liked Major Graham exceedingly, and they were both of opinion that Joy would be much happier married to him than living single for Jack Lockwood's sake.

The news reached the Selseys the next day just as they were going to dinner, and, as Frances foresaw, Felix came in later to discuss it, he having also heard of the engagement from his mother.

"Graham appears in a seventh heaven," said Felix.

"No wonder, lucky fellow. He has damped all my hopes. I always told Joy she was to be my second wife, if only the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill were passed in time," said Mr. Selsey, who was really a strong opponent of that measure.

"Don't talk such nonsense, Tom; it is very unclerical, too," said Frances, who seemed out of spirits and not altogether pleased at the news. "I hope she will be happy," she added, in a tone which implied she feared she would not.

"Happy! Why shouldn't she be happy?" exclaimed Mr. Selsey.

"Because I don't think she has got over her liking for Jack Lockwood yet," said Frances.

"How like you women. You are all so romantic and so impractical. I believe you would like Joy to be an old maid, because she once had a liking for young Lockwood," said Mr. Selsey.

"No, I should not; but I don't wish her to marry Major Graham unless she loves him. Marriage is too sacred to be entered into lightly, and a marriage without love is in my opinion a purgatory," said Frances.

"What do you think, Felix?"

"I agree with Frances. I think unless Joy loves Major Graham she had better remain single. Marriage is not the goal of existence, as people seem to think. It is a means to an end, it is not the end itself; the end is holiness, and if people can attain that end better in the married state, let them marry; if not, let them remain single," said Felix.

"High doctrine, Felix; but I believe you are right, although when I married Frances I fear I thought more of my own happiness than of holiness," said Mr. Selsey.

"I disapprove of long engagements as a rule, but I am glad Joy is not to be married for some time to come; she is quite young still," said Frances, and then the conversation turned on Felix's work.

He was a qualified surgeon now, and working hard among the

poor, generally making a nominal charge for his services, lest, as Mr. Selsey said, he should pauperize the people he attended.

"Do you think Felix will ever marry?" said Mr. Selsey to his wife that night after Felix had gone.

"I think not. I wish he would."

"It would surprise me very much if he did. I can't fancy him doing anything so usual; he is far more likely to become a hermit or a monk. Felix is a man born out of due time; he ought to have lived in the middle ages instead of in the nineteenth century; we are far too practical nowadays for men of his genius; he is wasted on us, we can't appreciate him."

"I sometimes think he liked Amy," said Frances.

"Amy! She is not fit to fasten his shoe-strings. I only know one woman on earth good enough for Felix, and she happens to be his sister and my wife, both inseparable objections."

"Your wife is tired of such flattery, and is going to bed," said Frances, smiling as she rose, and folding up her work went upstairs.

(To be continued.)